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Interview Summary

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Summary

Tony Blackburn, interviewed by David Hendy, talks about his life working in radio. Initially they discuss Blackburn's early life, and his motivation and interest in Radio and singing, which ultimately led to his career in the Radio Industry. He tells how he came to be recruited for the Pirate ships, and his subsequent roles at the BBC, and in Radio.

Blackburn talks about living and working on board the Pirate ships. He describes in detail the launch of Radio 1, and his first day at the BBC. He talks about the adjustment to working in a more formal environment than that of the Pirate Radio ships.

He discusses the design of the Radio studios that he worked in, and how records were selected, as well as the format of the Top 40 show, and selection of jingles and music to play, and emphasises his passion for using jingles in radio.

Blackburn talks about some of the people he worked with, and their roles at the BBC, including Johnny Beerling; Doreen Davies; Robin Scott; and Derek Chinnery.

Blackburn explains his approach to working on Radio, and how his job was to entertain. He has always avoided discussing politics on air, except when he told the Miners to go back to work and was temporarily suspended from Radio.

He also talks about the popularity of disc jockeys in the early days of Radio 1 and being a celebrity, and how he chose celebrity over marriage. Being a celebrity resulted in a busy schedule, doing radio shows and discos, and ultimately he reached the point of passing out from fatigue, realising that he had to slow down.

Blackburn talks about different styles of music, and his love for Motown and Soul music, along with Pop music, and the types of music which never appealed to him. He talks about his progression from the morning show through programmes at different times of the day, and presenting the children's show at the weekend, before presenting a new type of Soul programme on Radio London. He then explains how he left Radio London to move to Capital Gold.

Blackburn shares his views on management, and how he would approach managing people. He also talks about his interest in the latest technology and use of social media.

He also talks about how he came to be on the first 'I'm a Celebrity get me out of here', talking about what he did, his experience in the jungle, and how winning impacted his career.

He closes the interview reflecting on his time with the BBC, and how he is proud to be part of the BBC and talking about his plans to retire.

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Transcript

TB: Tony Blackburn

DH: David Hendy

CB: Catalina Balan

DH: [0:00:14] It's Saturday the 16 September 2017. And we're in studio 80A in Broadcasting House. And I'm interviewing Tony Blackburn. And I want to talk about growing up and your musical tastes and your – the formation of your radio listening and your work at the pirates in a moment.

A: [0:00:36] Yes.

Q: [0:00:37] But I want to start off by diving straight into an important moment in your life and in broadcasting history which is the launch of Radio 1 on the 30 September 1967. And I just wondered if you could sort of take us back to that day. Sort of what was happening before the show? What was the sort of run-up to the show? Can you give us a picture of that morning?

A: [0:01:00] Well, it was quite a build up to it because up until Radio 1 we didn't really have any studio that was designed as we'd worked out on the pirate ships. In other words putting all our own music on and all the jingles and things like that. So Kenny Everett and I had been asked to design the studio. And the BBC said, you know, "What do you need to recreate the sound that you've been giving us over the last three or four years or so out on the pirate ships?" And so Kenny and I designed the studio and we got exactly what we wanted with the, as in those

days, turntables and vinyl records and cartridge machines for the jingles. And so the studio was all set. And then I went in, I think it was about 5.30, 6 o'clock in the morning for the start at 7 o'clock. Robin Scott was there, and we did the countdown into Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3, you know, go. And it was all very exciting and very relaxed. Because I've always felt very at home with radio, I mean, right from the word go when I started broadcasting on the pirate ships. So I never suffered from nerves at all. So, for me, I knew this was an exciting moment, and to be asked to open up Radio 1. And somebody said to me: "it's a career in itself." And it sort of turned out that way, actually. But it was very relaxed, I wanted to make sure that I got the exact words right. Because we actually filmed the opening the night before for BBC Television. Because there wasn't facilities in those days to be able to broadcast it live via satellite. There weren't satellites, there wasn't satellite TV. So we filmed that the night before, and I just wrote out the words that I'd said. And, for some reason I said, "And welcome to the..." I don't know why I used to word and, "Welcome to the exciting new sound of Radio 1." And I was – I really wanted to get that right. Because I thought, if I mess that up I'm going to have to live with that for the rest of my life. But luckily it went very well. And the programme went very well, very smooth.

Q: [0:03:03] And you, the first record that you played, famously, was Flowers in the Rain –

A: [0:03:08] Yes.

Q: [0:03:09] But am I right in thinking you didn't particularly like that record?

A: [0:03:12] It wasn't one of my favourite records. It was one I chose because of the crashing sound. I mean, I liked the record, but it wouldn't be one that I would personally, you know, play for my own pleasure, particularly. But it was a nice record and it was a crashing sound and it was very lively. It was a hit at the time. So I thought it was a nice lively one to start off with. I mean, because, I remember hearing the opening of Capital Radio, and they started off with Bridge Over Troubled Water, which I thought was one of the most awful records to start any radio station with, quite ridiculous. So I wanted something nice and happy and something that reflected that era.

Q: [0:03:45] At that moment, when you were going on air and it was a national broadcast on Radio 1, were you aware of people listening out in the country? And even family and friends, that sense in which it was a moment when you were speaking to people that you hadn't been speaking to before?

A: [0:04:08] Not really, because when I broadcast I always have in my mind a family. And also, I think you're only talking ever to one person. You know, luckily it's not just one person usually, otherwise you wouldn't last long. But I wasn't aware of the amount of people. I mean, after we'd done that broadcast, it came out we'd gone to about twenty, twenty one million, I think it was. And the breakfast shows, you know, during that time, for about five years were about twenty million or so. Because there was nothing else, there wasn't commercial radio. So I wasn't aware of that, no. I mean, I was aware of the fact this was a bit of history in the making. But I was also aware that when we were out on the pirate ships that was altering the broadcasting in this country. I was very aware of that. So it was another step forward in the history of

radio. Which I was very proud to – and I am very proud of being a part of.

Q: [0:04:56] Was it assumed, do you think, by the BBC that your role, in a way, was to just precisely recreate the shows that you'd been doing with the pirates. Or was there a sort of new style required? Was there a sort of, an adjustment? Or was there actually, "We just want Tony Blackburn to do what he was doing with the pirates?"

A: [0:05:17] Yes, I think, really, they just wanted me to do what I'd been doing with Pirate Radio. Johnny Beerling, who was a producer at the time, a senior producer, he'd already been out to the pirate ship Radio London, unofficially, to see how we did it. And he was very much in favour of recreating that sound. And I think the BBC were very sensible there. They didn't – they realised that they were being forced, actually, by the Labour Government, to move on. There were some people there, I don't think, who – I think they were quite happy to have just gone on the way it was. But there was an element there that realised that they had to move forward and the monopoly was basically coming to an end and they had to provide music for younger people. So, very sensibly, I thought, they intermingled the older disc jockeys like Pete Murray and Alan Freeman at the time, with the younger disc jockeys. But they did want that Pirate Radio sound, and that's exactly what we gave them. So there was nobody who came to me and said, oh, we'd rather you did it that way or this way. We were given total freedom. And they seemed to like the fact that I was telling silly jokes. And [laughs] you know, enthusing about the music.

Q: [0:06:27] But wasn't there an effort to kind of, right at the beginning, to kind of think of it as something that was scripted? I mean, because

that was the BBC tradition, really, was – I mean, spontaneous presenter talk was pretty unknown to the BBC at that time.

A: [0:06:42] Well, it was. But, you see, before Radio 1 I was on the third – Radio 3. I'm sorry, can I just [inaudible 0:06:48]?

Q: [0:06:48] Yes.

A: [0:06:48] Before I was on Radio 1 I was on the Light Programme. And when I first went in to do the Light Programme, and it was a programme called Midday Spin. And it was three quarters of an hour of music. And I remember my producer there, Peter Jones, I'd never met a producer before, because out on the pirate ships we didn't have things like that. So Peter Jones said to me, he said, very nice man, he said, "Could I have your script?" And I said, "Well, I haven't got a script." And he said, "Well, how do you know what you're going to say?" and I said, "Well, I don't. I ad lib." And he said, "Ooh, not used to that." And he showed me an Alan Freeman script that said, "And right now, pop pickers, are..." And it had the words AH written in [laughs]. And I said, "Well, I can't do that, I'm sorry." And he said, "That's fine." He said, "But, so you're going to ad lib, and we'll do what they call tops and tails." So you just talked into the record and then it came to the end. And we just rehearsed it that way which was totally pointless, actually. Because, you know, I didn't know what I was going to say until I said it. And he said to me, he said, "Can you possibly come in an hour before the programme? Because otherwise I have to cancel the coffee and doughnuts." And [laughs] so I used to go in every week an hour before and we used to just sit down and have a chat and have coffee and doughnuts. And that was it.

Q: [0:08:10] So by the time that Radio 1 was launched, that particular kind of niggles was sort of sorted out and you were able to be spontaneous on that first day?

A: [0:08:19] Yeah, I wouldn't really call it a niggles, even. I mean, nobody ever put at me pressure to write a script. They just weren't used to it. They were – and I suppose they were worried about what I would say, you know. Because it wasn't as free in those days, I don't think, for a lot of people. They want – the BBC wanted – they were basically control freaks and they wanted to know exactly what people were saying, so we didn't say anything wrong. Because it was a live show. And, I mean, but anybody who'd heard me over the last three years on Radio Caroline and Big L Radio London, would know that I wasn't going to say anything outrageous.

Q: [0:08:52] And that brings me to a question about whether or not you were perceived, perhaps, by the BBC as, yes, a pirate who'd made a splash. But also someone who – you had a clean-cut image at the same time as well.

A: [0:09:08] Oh yes, yeah.

Q: [0:09:09] So, in other words, you were also relatively safe to the BBC. Do you think there was that calculation?

A: [0:09:14] Oh absolutely, yes. I'm a public school boy, and that was very important in those days [laughs]. In fact, one of the first questions I was asked, you know, "Oh yes, you went to Millfield, didn't you?" I said, "Yes." "Oh, that's alright." And at some of the BBC functions afterwards,

you know, where there was the chairman of this, that and the other there, I was always the one that was wheeled along because they knew I'd put a suit on and a tie and call one or two people sir. And, you know, and I was the acceptable face of the pirates, I think, really.

Q: [0:09:44] And was that the real you or were you consciously thinking, actually, if I play this right I'll be safe in the BBC?

A: [0:09:53] Oh no, that's the real me, I wasn't a rebel. No, I mean, okay, I was a Pirate Radio disc jockey. But I've never been a rebel, I'm very establishment, I think. And certainly it fitted in in those days, you know. I mean, I had a – you know, this voice I've got, which is slightly BBCish with a slight, I was told, a North Atlantic accent, slightly, I don't know. But it fitted in very well for the BBC at the time, yes. And, I think, right, you know, they trusted me, really, yes.

Q: [0:10:21] I know you said that the BBC was really looking to sort of import, lock, stock and barrel, the kind of pirate style.

A: [0:10:30] Yes.

Q: [0:10:30] But over time, and I'm just thinking, even just the first few months or so, did it sort of become something slightly less like the pirates and something slightly more like the BBC in some way?

A: [0:10:43] Well, it had a problem. My shows were always like the pirates, I think. It had a problem that we had needle time problems, needle time restrictions. This was the Performing Rights Society and, of course,

the Musicians' Union. Which I'd already been sacked from because I was a singer with a dance band in Bournemouth. And I – when they found out I was going to be a pirate radio disc jockey and play records, they said, "Ooh, you know, you either become a member of – or stay a member of the Musicians' Union and play live music, as you have been..." You know, being a guitarist and a singer. "Or if you start playing records out on the North Sea, I'm afraid that's not – that's against live music." So I decided that I was quite happy to be sacked by the Musicians' Union and take my chances. And so the BBC had a problem. I mean, my show eventually was a two hour show. I had ninety minutes of what they call needle time restriction. So the BBC weren't able to do like as the pirates had done, in other words play record after record after record. Because they had to pay for it and they had a restricted amount of time because the Performing Rights Society, in particular the Musicians' Union, wanted to keep music live whereas the audience wanted to hear recorded music. And that was the problem they had. So it was – sometimes Radio 2 would join Radio 1 and you had Jimmy Young coming in and singing on his own programme. Basically, not because he was necessarily a wonderful singer, which he was, he was a very good singer, but it was to save needle time. So this is the problem that Radio 1 and Radio 2 had in the early days. Which was sorted out eventually, but it took a long time. The unions held broadcasting back very strongly for a long, long time.

Q: [0:12:28] But your particular show, the breakfast show, in a sense was able to kind of – in other words the needle time that Radio 1 had allocated was kind of used up, to a certain extent, by your breakfast show because that was the most important show.

A: [0:12:40] Yes, the most important show on Radio 1 was the breakfast show. And that was the key show to have. And they put all the resources into that. And they still do on any radio station now, you know, the breakfast show is the one that gets the resources and that's the one that people love doing.

Q: [0:12:54] Just one last question about that moment in September 1967 which is, a lot of the publicity at the time that the BBC were putting out did actually stress your sort of wholesomeness [laughs].

A: [0:13:05] Did it [laughs]?

Q: [0:13:07] And I wondered whether or not you think that, in 1967, there was starting to be a bit of a reaction against the wilder side of the 1960s. That the BBC, that it didn't want to kind of represent the 60s at its most sort of radical and rebellious or whatever.

A: [0:13:28] I wasn't aware of that. I mean, we'd had the flower power era. And I thought that was a lot of fun, and it was peace and love and all the rest of it. And people wearing – I mean, when I joined the BBC I put a suit on to try and fit in. And some of the producers there were wearing flowery shirts [laughs] and trying to be cool. I've never followed trends, I've always just been myself, you know, I've never bothered about that. So I wasn't aware that we were wild and whacky and things like that. So I wasn't aware of there was any problems at the BBC and they were trying to make it more BBCish, I don't think so. The people running the BBC, I think people like Derek Chinnery who was very establishment, he was the first Head of Radio 1. And I thought he was very good. He was first Controller of Radio 1, and I thought he

was very good. He really fought for us within the BBC. Because there were elements there, I think I've said, the people at Radio 4, particularly, they looked down their noses about us a bit, there was a bit of snobbishness there, "Those disc jockeys. And now the time is..." You know, so there was that a little bit. Not that we mixed with them very much. But it all sorted itself out. And the only comment I got, and the only negative comment I got from the first breakfast show, was from within the BBC, Radio 4, I think. Who, you know, they tried to say, "Well, not as good as we thought it was going to be." Everybody else loved it.

Q: [0:14:49] One thing that's interesting, which I'll mention, it's not really a question, but an observation, is that the Controller, I think, of Radio 4 at the time, was Gerry Mansell.

A: [0:14:59] Oh yes.

Q: [0:14:59] And in his Interview for the BBC oral history he kind of says that he thought that Radio 1 was doing really interesting things and that Radio 4 should learn from Radio 1 and the more spontaneous style of presenting. So it's very interesting that the person who was actually right at the top of Radio 4 at the time was thinking Radio 1 is showing the future. And he was struggling to get some of his staff, the presenters on Radio 4, to be a bit more like Radio 1.

A: [0:15:26] Well, in that case, I love him very much. And he probably wasn't the one that was criticising, then, in that case. Because we never met anybody, I don't – from Radio 4, I mean, I was twenty four years old at the time and Radio 4 was for the older people. Whereas

now I'm an older person, I like Radio 4 very much [laughs]. But, no, I mean, it was probably some of the, you know, presenters there or the journalists who were a bit older, and all these younger people coming in. So that was probably it. But I wasn't aware of that. I was aware that Robin Scott was very happy with what I'd done. And the problem, actually, at the time was more Radio 2. It got no publicity at all because Paul Hollingdale, he opened up Radio 2, I opened up Radio 1, and I got all the publicity. Understandably, because it was a new generation of – we were all pirate, ex-pirate disc jockeys now. And so Radio 2 was the one that they didn't quite know what to do with. And it's interesting now that, you know, fifty years on, it's totally changed. You know, Radio 2 is the one with the biggest audience.

Q: [0:16:29] I also seem to remember, at the time, from seeing photographs, that there were some people at Radio 1, I don't know if it was producers or presenters, who were wearing t-shirts that said Death to the Home Service. Does that ring a bell [laughs]?

A: [0:16:40] [Laughs] I don't remember that, no, I never had one of those.

Q: [0:16:45] But I wondered whether or not there was a sort of a feel of – I mean, it ties in with what you were saying about some of the response from kind of, you know, some of the Radio 4 kind of people. A sense in which you felt that it was quite enjoyable to be this new force inside the BBC and to be a little bit disruptive. I wonder if there was a sort of pleasure to that.

A: [0:17:05] Do you know, I don't think so. I think we were – I think Radio 1, when it came on we were so focused on what we were doing. And

we weren't really bothered about anything else at the BBC. I don't think we actually thought about any other station. We were so self-obsessed with what we were doing. I mean, we were having so much success at it I think we were just enjoying the moment. And, you know, Radio 1 – the pirate radio era had moved on and we'd moved on with it. And I think it was enormously successful and the public accepted it. I think if radio – if the BBC had tried to provide a service for the youngsters without involving the pirate radio stations, I think it would have been rejected right from the word go. But because, you know, people like Kenny Everett and myself and Dave Cash and people like that were welcomed into the BBC, I think the kids of the time, the youngsters at the time, actually, they took it to their heart. And –

Q: [0:18:03] That was just a very good call by the BBC to take that strategy?

A: [0:18:07] Oh, excellent. I think the BBC did it very, very, well. And they couldn't have done it any better. And there was no restraint, you know, we weren't told, "You have to do this, you have to do that." I mean, certainly, when we – in those days there were – I mean, a good example is you had to get permission to wish Her Majesty the Queen a happy birthday, you know, from the Palace. So you had to be very careful of that thing. And some of the things that you hear nowadays on television and radio, we certainly couldn't have done that in the early days. And I'd never – I didn't want to, actually, to be honest with you. Some of the stuff we have nowadays absolutely shocks me, that we have. You know, I don't see the point of OFCOM, to be honest with you. When you see a programme like Naked Attraction, you think why the hell are they there, you know, it's [laughs] –

Q: [0:18:52] Maybe we'll come back to that. Come back to that
[inaudible 0:18:55].

A: [0:18:55] Yeah. But, I mean, so I think the BBC, you know, 100%, I thought they did it very, very well. And the people at the BBC, the producers and the – I had nothing but respect for them, I thought they did it very, very well. And they didn't try and hold us down or anything, quite the reverse.

Q: [0:19:11] Okay, I want to kind of go back in time now and take you back to your childhood, really, I suppose.

Q: [0:19:17] Yes.

Q: [0:19:17] When – what memories do you have of first becoming aware of radio, as a listener?

A: [0:19:23] Oh, right from the word go, really. I mean, I just – my mum and dad said that when I was sitting in the cot, I – the first words I said were, "Moo, moos." For music. And I love music. I've always loved music and was fascinated by the radio right from the word go and just loved it. And I used to listen particularly to, I guess, Radio Luxembourg in those days, and I used to listen to it, and, you know, I couldn't get enough music. And I particularly liked American music, the Doo-wop music and the American black music at the time. So my taste was not quite the same as some of the young, you know, the teenagers of the time. Mine was much more – it was always black soul music.

Q: [0:20:04] And was that one of the reasons that you were drawn towards Radio Luxembourg rather than, say, the Light Programme, or did you chop and change between them?

A: [0:20:13] Well, I used to love the – things like The Goon Show and Round the Horne and some of the early comedy shows. Because the BBC is very, very good at talking nonsense. I mean, they're tremendous at that. And some of those early shows that they had were terrific. And I still listen to them all on 4 Extra, you know, they have these shows still. And I love them, you know, The Navy Lark and things like that. So I used to listen to the BBC more for comedy shows more than anything else. Because there wasn't much for teenagers at that time. You know, there was only three quarters of an hour of music every day, I think. So they weren't catering for the younger audience. It was much more the – more interested in educating the nation than entertaining, I think. But the comedy shows, I thought, were marvellous, you know, The Goon Show, which the establishment thought was The Gong Show, I think, at one time [laughs] they thought. And I think, you know, the Peter Sellers and the comedy, I loved that. So that's what I was listening to the BBC for. I mean, I used to drive to the college that I went to in Bournemouth, and listening in to the breakfast shows there with all the Northern Dance Orchestra and those sorts of things, which didn't really appeal to me very much. I thought that – but we had to live with that, that's all there was. I used to enjoy listening to Radio Luxembourg in the evening. But even that was a bit dodgy because it kept fading in and out, it wasn't – but that's all we had, you know, that's all we were used to.

Q: [0:21:35] And when you were catching Radio Luxembourg and you could hear it, what were the programmes or the presenters that particularly you tried to listen out for?

A: [0:21:44] Pete Murray particularly, I liked Pete Murray. I mean, he told dreadful jokes as well. I mean, he tends to forget that. And so my shows in the early days were based more on him than anything else. He was quite – and he was quite adventurous for that time, you know, some of the jokes were quite adventurous. Pete Murray I liked, Alan Freeman. I liked Alan Freeman because he had the ability to say nothing, really, you know, the, "Not half." And, "Ah, oh-oh, yes." And that sort of thing, he never actually said anything. And that was his charm, he had a complete style of his own. And I think those were probably the two broadcasters I liked. I liked David Jacobs, he was terribly BBC, and I loved David Jacobs. When I got to meet him, I just loved him as a person. And I thought he was charming. And Pete Murray was lovely, because he was the first one to show me round the BBC. And I've always had an admiration for him.

Q: [0:22:39] Just – there's one moment when I was reading your autobiography which was quite striking, which was, you sort of left Millfield, quite suddenly, you just kind of basically got on a train and headed home and decided it wasn't for you.

A: [0:22:52] No.

Q: [0:22:53] I mean, do you, was that something that you think was the right decision or do you regret not taking a different path?

A: [0:22:58] No, I think it was totally the right decision. I mean, I was – I was academically not interested in anything to do with – I just didn't – wasn't interested, really. I just wanted to be in show business. I wanted to be a singer. And that's all I wanted. And I thought I was wasting my time at school. And so I wanted to get my examinations. At Millfield I was quite good at sport, although I can't stand it, really, but I was very good at it. And so I was in all the teams. And at Millfield, at the time, if you were good at football or rugby or something like that, they'd stick you on a pitch there and you'd play for the school. But, academically, I wanted just to pass my exams and get away from school. So I just got on a train one day, and told the Headmaster at the time I was going out with my parents. So I got on a train and I got – went home and I said to my father, I said, "Look, you're spending a fortune at the school." And I said, "I'm not really interested in it. I just want to be a singer." And, but I said, "If that – obviously I wanted to get my exams." So I had private tuition for about a year, I think it was, passed my exams. Then went to college to study, I've got a diploma in business studies. But at the same time I was singing with a dance band. And it was very difficult to get into that, you know.

Q: [0:24:18] And this was in Bournemouth?

A: [0:24:18] This was in Bournemouth, yes. And at the weekends I was going up and studying at the Berman School of Singing. I started to be a singer. And I used to go up and sing The Night has a Thousand Eyes by Bobby Vee and that's the only song we used to practise on. And so I used to go backwards and forwards to that at weekends. But it was a waste of time being at school for me, you know. I just found it – I wasn't interested. And my dad, actually, funnily enough, he went to Rugby School, and he wanted me to go too. He wanted to give me the best

start in life. So I had to pass Common Entrance at that time, and I, on purpose, tried to fail it. And I did. I spectacularly failed Common Entrance. Slightly on purpose, I didn't do any studies for it at all. But he found this school, Millfield, where, basically, I could get in without having to pass an exam. And I remember, I took an intelligence test, and it came out the fact that – the guy said I'd never pass an exam in my life [laughs]. In other words I was thick. And anyhow, I passed all my exams and all the O-Levels and I passed them. And I got onto this guy called Livvy something or other, and I said, "You were wrong, you know, I wasn't as stupid as you thought I was." And I just wrote to him, and I never got a reply back. But I wasn't as stupid as they made out. But I later on said to my father, I said, "I never wanted to go to public school, really, and boarding school." And he said, "Well, we never wanted you to go." And he said, "If you'd only told me that I wouldn't have sent you there." He was just – he was just doing his best for me.

Q: [0:25:57] And were your mother and father supportive of you trying to set out on a singing and a musical career?

A: [0:26:04] Oh yes, yes. I think to start off with my mum and dad thought that, you know, it was just a teenage thing and I wanted to be another Billy Fury or something like that or The Beatles or something like that, and they didn't think I was serious. Well, I think they always thought I was serious about it, but –

Q: [0:26:19] And you were serious about it?

A: [0:26:20] Oh, terribly, yeah, terribly, very focused and wanted to do it. Like my daughter is now, you know, she's an actress and she's very

focused on what she wants. She's always wanted to do that. And my daughter is much more like [me than] my son. My son is quite a good actor, but he never wanted to go into it. I think he saw what show business has done to me [laughs], "Don't want to end up like Dad." But my daughter wanted that. No, I was always wanting to do that. And I got very frustrated when I went to the Larry Parnes Stage Shows. Sorry, am I drifting away from things? The Larry Parnes Stage Shows, that was a touring show, where you'd see people like Marty Wilde and Billy Fury, and I used to see them. And I used to look at them and think, God, that's the life I want to do. And I thought, nobody's ever going to discover me. And it was very frustrating. And so when I had this chance to go on – become a pirate, you know, I read in the New Musical Express that they wanted DJs for Radio Caroline and I applied for it and got the job. And that, I thought, that's great.

Q: [0:27:23] And, until that point, until you saw that advert, had radio as a career been on your radar at all? Or was it all essentially about music? I mean, performing or...?

A: [0:27:34] Yeah, I used to, at home, I used to – I rigged up – we had this massive great radiogram, which was a turntable and radio. And I rigged up a thing, a speaker in the hall, and I used to pretend to be a disc jockey to my mum and dad, you know, I used to do that. So do mock radio programmes, if you like. So I always loved the idea of it. But I did think by being a disc jockey I would get closer to the record business. Because I'd been up to – I'd auditioned for Decca Records, and I got turned down, because they said I was too much like Cliff Richard at the time [laughs]. And I got turned down by EMI Records as a singer. So I wasn't having much success there. So I thought, well, if I become a disc jockey, at least I'll be a part of the music business and

possibly get closer to the record business and be asked to make records. Which actually happened. So that's the way I got into it, if you like. But it wasn't easy to get into, because the BBC, I thought there's no chance of getting in there. Because I was only twenty years old and all the DJs, like I say, were all a bit older, you know. But so that's why I got into it. I was very lucky, because once you get your first break, it's like anything, you know, that is a starter.

Q: [0:28:50] So music was important to you, radio was about to become important for you [inaudible 0:28:53]?

A: [0:28:53] Yes.

Q: [0:28:54] At that stage, though, in your sort of late teens, early twenties, just when you were, you know, just starting to sort of set out in life, what about television? Was television – I know it later became important, but at that stage was television on your radar as either something that you watched a lot of or you thought about being on?

A: [0:29:15] I've always loved television. But my first love, and it still is, is radio. Even when I was doing Top of the Pops and things like that, I still much preferred doing the radio shows. There's something about radio, for me, that is so instant, it's – and you don't have people in the studio counting you down into – and you can be yourself. You've got all the time in the world to be yourself and talk directly to people. And in those days as well, you know, television wasn't live, it was always recorded. And I much preferred radio, and I was better on radio. I was – I didn't have the confidence in myself, in my appearance or

anything like that. Actually, when I look back at myself on Top of the Pops, I was alright, I looked quite good. And [laughs] –

Q: [0:30:03] I'm going to come back to Top of the Pops in a second. But I just want to talk a little bit about Radio Caroline and Radio London before we come to that. Because I'm – otherwise I'll forget [laughs].

A: [0:30:12] Yes, of course, yes.

Q: [0:30:14] So you saw the advert in NME?

A: [0:30:19] Yes.

Q: [0:30:19] And you started at Radio Caroline in July 1964.

A: [0:30:24] Yeah.

Q: [0:30:27] Just – can you sort of take me through that process, from sort of seeing the advert to sort of, you know, arriving and doing your first show, just what the sort of links in the chain were?

A: [0:30:35] Well, I read an advertisement in the New Musical Express wanting DJs for Radio Caroline. And I'd never actually heard Radio Caroline because living in Poole, in Dorset, the signal didn't get there. But I'd seen a documentary about it on, I think it was on ITV, they did some programme on it. And I thought, oh, that's interesting, that's really interesting, the fact that they're going to be doing this. And it

had only just opened. And then I read this advert, and my mother said to me, she said, "Look, you keep going on about wanting to be in the music business. You know, go for it." So I recorded myself on a, I think it was a Phillips, you know, recorder, introducing four records. And sent it off to Radio Caroline. And I remember going down the road to a little place called Lilliput where I live, which is very near Sandbanks, and posting it into the post box. And, when I posted it, I knew that that was going to be the start. I just knew that I was going to get the job. It was strange. As soon as I let that envelope go, I knew that was it. Something in me told me that it was going to happen. And then I got a letter back from Radio Caroline saying, "We'd like you to come up to 6, Chesterfield Gardens, and meet you." And they gave me the date. And then I got another letter back, saying, "We were unable to hear your tape, please could you re-record it?" And I thought, no, I'm going to just go up there, I've got a date and I'm going to go up there. So I did, I turned up, and they'd obviously forgotten the fact that they couldn't hear the tape. And so I went down to the studios, I met a guy called Christopher somebody or other, I can't remember his name now, I should remember his name. And very nice guy, and he said, "Go down to the studios, and if you'd like to do a recording, we'd like to hear you do it." So I did the recording. And then, for some reason, when he was in the office he was standing on his head throwing darts at a dartboard [laughs]. I never understood quite why. And he was there, I don't know how he did it. He was balanced up against the wall, throwing, so he had this dart, throwing it at a dartboard. Then he quickly got up and said hello. And I thought, oh, he's a nut [laughs] so he's my sort of person. And so I went downstairs and did this recording. Then he said, "Can you come back in a couple of hours, and we'll listen to it." And so I wandered around Hyde Park and came back. And I went in there, and he said, "You know, we like it. Can you start next week?" And it wasn't a surprise to me, because I thought – and when I

was wandering round Hyde Park, I thought, this is pointless because they're going to give me the job anyway. So when I went back, he said, you know, "You've got the job." And so I said, "Great." He said, "Can you start on Wednesday?" So I said, "Well, could I – I think I can but I've got to give my job up at the Pavilion Ballrooms." Because that's where I was singing. So I did that, and I was out on the ship, I think it was on the Wednesday. And started broadcasting on the, I think it was probably the Thursday, the following day.

Q: [0:33:41] And can you just sort of give a sketch for us of what the atmosphere was like, the sort of working conditions and so on for the [both talking at once]

A: [0:33:47] Yeah, sure. I mean, I remember first of all going from Harwich. We went out on a little tender boat to the Mi Amigo which was Radio Caroline. And I remember going out there. It was a little bit choppy, the sea, and I remember seeing this little boat. And I thought, God this is marvellous. This little boat, three and a half miles off the coast of Frinton and giving the BBC and the Government so many problems. I thought, to be a part of this is just wonderful. And I remember going on board the ship, and there were all the Dutch seamen there. And – because it flew under the flag of Panama, actually. Anything illegal was done under the Panamanian flag in those days. And then I was introduced to one or two of the DJs on board. And the conditions on board were quite cramped. It was a very small little boat. The studio was above water line, with this massive great Radio Caroline mast. And the studio was designed, it was right next door to the generator, which was a problem in the early days. Because, originally, when we went out there, somebody else put the records on for us. And then eventually we started putting them on ourselves. And you could

always hear the noise of the generator because we were next to it. We had bunks downstairs, we slept below the level line there. And you had a bunk and there was somebody sleeping below you. So it was quite a cramped conditions. But, I mean, I was twenty one years old, it didn't matter, really, it was just fun being out there. And I always remember the food I didn't like very much. I'm a very fussy food eater anyway, I'm a vegetarian. And they would serve up, what was it, they served up uncooked um, was it herrings. That's right, the Dutch love herrings, they're obsessed by them. And they'd serve herrings up, which I'd never eaten. And I survived mainly on bread, I think, in those days. But apart from that it was lovely, you know. The sea, when it got rough, the Radio Caroline boat, the studios were being above the water line, so we got thrown around quite a bit. The turntables kept going and everything, and we used to put thrupenny bits on the arms so it kept them on the record. And we used to quite often, because the people loved hearing us going through it, the listeners, so we'd throw ashtrays to the side of the thing to make it sound as though we were going through absolute hell. Which we were, you know, we weren't strapped in, but we had to hold on.

Q: [0:36:08] When you were on air and you were doing your show at Radio Caroline, did you kind of get that sense of, yes, actually, this is what I want to do, this is it?

Q: [0:36:16] Oh, yeah, absolutely. I mean, the first programme I did was the Big Line Up. It was called the Big Line Up, it was at four o'clock in the afternoon. And the first record I played was Rag Doll by the Four Seasons. And from the moment I went on the air it was just as natural as anything to me. And I absolutely adored it. And I, you know, I

came to the end of the programme and I just couldn't wait to get back on again. It was just natural to me, totally natural.

Q: [0:36:38] But was there a sort of thought in your mind about, still, that actually, ultimately it was a singing and performing career that you wanted and this might be a means to an end?

A: [0:36:46] No.

Q: [0:36:46] Or was it fairly instantly a case of, actually, this now is actually what I want to do?

A: [0:36:51] Yes, oh yes, right from the word go, from the word – you know, the moment I got on the air this is what I want to do. Okay, I mean, I'd like to – I could probably be a singer as well, but this is what I want to do. Because first of all, if you're a singer you're always around on the next hit. Whereas being a disc jockey, I worked out that that was something you could do for a longer time. And so therefore – and also I loved it, you know, I just loved talking nonsense and playing great music. And that to me was what I wanted to do. And I loved – you know, I mean, fifty three years ago it is now, I've loved every moment of it, and I still do. You know, I mean, I've been on the air this morning, playing the records, actually, that I was playing fifty four years ago as new releases. That's the amazing thing about doing now, Sounds of the 60s, I'm playing records that I made hits, or helped to make hits. It's very strange.

Q: [0:37:45] After a while you switched to Radio London, which is another of the pirates.

A: [0:37:49] Yes.

Q: [0:37:49] What was the reason for that?

A: [0:37:50] Well, Big L, Radio London – I'd been to America to – I went to America to hear American radio and commercial radio. And I was sat in a hotel –

Q: [0:38:01] That was – Radio Caroline sort of sent you there or...?

A: [0:38:05] No, no, I was with Radio Caroline, but I had a couple of weeks off, and I wanted to hear American radio. And I went and, this is how sad I am, I sat in a hotel room and just listened to it. And I heard WABC, New York, a guy called Dan Ingram, who was a top forty disc jockey. And I eventually, I went into the studios and saw the way they did it. And it was very, I don't know, it wasn't, to me it wasn't very personalised radio. It was –, you know, all he used to say was, "This is Dan Ingram." Ding, "We got twenty eight WABC degrees." And that was it. And it was just top forty radio. But not something Radio Caroline was doing. And I remember doing the breakfast show on Radio Caroline, and there was a rumour that another ship was coming, approaching. And it was amazing. I was doing this show, the breakfast show, and there was a sea mist. And as the sea mist cleared, this massive Radio London boat was there, the MV Galaxy. And as it cleared, it was about two or three times the size of Radio Caroline. And they started these test transmissions with these Wonderful Radio London jingles. And these jingles, I mean, I love jingles anyway, and, to me, I don't think that modern day radio, they don't understand that jingles are one of the

most important things in broadcasting. And eventually I brought them back on Pick of the Pops, when I was doing Pick of the Pops, and I brought back the original jingles again. And, absolutely fabulous. So I heard these jingles, and I thought, I've got to be a part of this. And...

Q: [0:39:41] So it was the sort of extra professionalism of Radio London that drew you towards [both talking at once]?

A: [0:39:49] Yeah, it was – this was the American-run operation. Radio Caroline was – everybody remembers Radio Caroline, but it wasn't as professionally run. It was – it was there, basically, more piratical if you like, than Radio London. Radio London was there to make money and to bring about top forty radio. And it did. And I heard the first programmes, and I thought, God, this is what I want to do. It's professional, I heard Kenny and Cash, Kenny Everett and Dave Cash doing their shows. And I thought, this is what I want to do. And they were playing top forty music. Whereas Radio Caroline, I'd do my breakfast show and then suddenly there'd be show music on. And eventually people who liked pop music would go, you know, "Oh, we don't want show music." And then, "We don't want jazz. We don't want this, that and the other. We don't want big bands at the end of the day." Radio London was the first one that focused into its audience, and, "This is what we want to do. Anybody who wants show music, go to Radio Caroline, we don't care, you know. We're going to give you top forty popular music." And that's exactly the way I've always focused everything. You're never more than one record away from a hit. And the Radio London format was a half an hour of one to ten. It made up its own fabulous forty chart, one to ten, eleven to forty. Climber, in other words a new record, revive forty five, an old record, another American hit. And then you just rotated the same records.

We had, in the studio we had a box of records. Records in those days were top ten records. The eleven to forty, and as you played the record you moved it to the back of the pile. And that's all it was. And it was as simple as that, it was dynamic. And that's what brought about broadcasting, the proper broadcasting, I'd say, in this country, you know, the American top forty. And that's – so I had to be a part of that. I went – the tender boat serviced the two ships. So it went from Radio Caroline. I went to Radio Caroline. Then it went to Radio London. And a guy called Tony Windsor leaned over the side of the Radio London boat, and he said, [in Australian accent], "Hello, sport." He was Australian – I don't do an Australian – he wanted, he didn't sound like that. He was the Head disc jockey, and he said, "Hello, Tone, how would you like to come here?" So I said, "Very much so." And so he said, "Go into the offices at 7, Chesterfield Gardens." And I met Tony Windsor there, and he said to me, "I want you to change your name to Mark Roman and become..." I said, "Change my name to Mark Roman?" He said, "Yeah. We've got this idea, at six o'clock in the evening be a part of – you're Mark Roman and you're part of the Roman empire. Your listeners are part of your Roman empire." I said, "I can't do that. My name is Tony Blackburn, I can't..." I said, "They'll recognise the fact, I've been broadcasting on Caroline for three years, or two years." And he said, "Well, it's an American thing where, if you do change stations, you change your name." I said, "Well, I'll stay with Radio Caroline." He said, "So you won't come?" I said, "No, no". So then about a month later, went to – the boat went to Radio Caroline again. I was going off board, and there was Tony Windsor there, "Hello, Tone", he said, "I'd like to meet up with you". And I met up with him again at, down at Radio London offices, Curzon Street, and he said, "Okay, come under your own name". So fine. So I went on board and I resigned from Radio Caroline and went to Radio London. And I went on board the ship and just went in the studio and played with those

jingles for about an hour, and just played them over and over again. I thought they were just fantastic. And I went on there and did my usual act of telling silly jokes and things like that. And Tony Windsor tried to stop me telling jokes. He said, "No future in somebody telling jokes, no future for it." And he said, "I don't want any of that". Because he was the head disc jockey. I said, "Okay, alright, then, you don't think there's a future. I'm going to go back to Radio Caroline and I'm going to get a – try and get a programme against you and take all your listeners from you". I was that arrogant. And he said, "Hold on." [Laughs] And then he just let me do what I wanted.

Q: [0:44:07] Okay, so that's – I mean, that brings me to another question, really. Which is that, I mean, it was quite formatted, obviously, the top forty format.

A: [0:44:13] Yes.

Q: [0:44:14] And, I mean, you mentioned, at WABC, you know, actually one of the things that felt very strange was that the presenters weren't able to kind of fully express their personality or be spontaneous.

A: [0:44:24] Yeah.

Q: [0:44:25] And I wondered how you managed to kind of negotiate that, you know, in that second pirate experience. Because it felt as if what you really wanted to do was to be yourself and yet the format really required you to be quite mechanical.

A: [0:44:42] Well, the format, actually, on Radio London, although they brought in the top forty format, they allowed us to have personalities. So it's everything that commercial radio in this country, in my opinion, doesn't do now. I think commercial radio in this country has lost its way totally by not allowing the DJs to have their personality. And that's the tragedy of it. Three in a row and a time check, a monkey can do that. But, whereas with Radio London, the early days of Radio London, I'm talking about the pirate ship now, it was the top forty, rotating the same singles. Which I agree with. And the format was great because they freshened up the play list every week. And they were ahead of the national chart, that was the secret of it. But they did allow us to talk and be ourselves and tell stupid jokes and all the rest of it. And it was enormously successful. So I didn't feel under any restraint not to be myself. In fact, we were encouraged to be ourselves. And people with – like Kenny Everett and Dave Cash, you know, they were very creative, anyway. So we were all allowed to be ourselves within the format. We didn't choose the music, but they chose the music very well, anyway, and they – it was a top forty format. And I thought the station, it was – I think, until this day, I think it was the best station we ever had in this country. There's never been a station better.

Q: [0:45:58] You were a pirate for three years, before they were stopped.

A: [0:46:02] Yes.

Q: [0:46:03] Would you have liked to have stayed doing that for longer? Or did you think that, by the middle of 1967 you'd sort of had enough, that was, you know, three years was enough of that?

A: [0:46:16] Yes, I think three years was enough. I mean, I loved being on the North Sea, I loved every moment of the pirate radio stations, I enjoyed it. I can't think of a negative thing I could say about it, except that they made a film called *The Boat that Rocked*, which didn't represent anything that we were doing out there. Because we were seriously trying to alter broadcasting in the country. We weren't a load of drunken fools out there having parties. We never had parties out there. There were no girls on board. We were allowed two bottles of beer a day, and that was it. Because you're out on the North Sea, it's dangerous. That film I hate, absolutely hate and it didn't represent anything that we represented. And I'm really proud to have been a part of pirate radio. Having said that, I think that was the time, three years we'd proved what we were, what we wanted. We wanted to bring about commercial radio. We didn't bring about that. And we actually brought about Radio 1, which still, the BBC had its monopoly. But even when I was opening up Radio 1, I knew that that monopoly wouldn't last forever, it couldn't. Commercial radio was a long time coming because we had to get rid of the Labour Government. And [laughs] and when the Conservatives came in, I think I'm right in saying, they brought about commercial radio. Which should have been brought about right from the word go.

Q: [0:47:29] And do you think that the whole pirate sort of mission was more about bringing in commercial radio than bringing in pop radio [both talking at once]?

A: [0:47:37] Oh, 100%. Well, no, I think it was a bit of both. I think it was about bringing in popular music for a mass audience. And we were entertaining the audience that we wanted to, a younger audience, and bring about that. Some of the pirate stations on the forts were

playing easy listening music as well. So we were bringing about choice.

Q: [0:47:59] And was the thought, then, do you think that, actually, it was only going to be commercial radio that would bring in pop radio? I mean, was it something of a surprise that, in the end, it ended up, at that stage, being the BBC that actually took over pop radio, as it were?

A: [0:48:12] Yes, I think it was, yes. I mean, I didn't think for one moment that it was going to be the BBC. I always had an admiration for the BBC. And I thought the BBC was a place I would eventually like to be. Because I thought that, you know, although it had a bit of a stuffy image, I thought what it did it did very well. And it was a big organisation. But I always visualised going from a pirate radio station to on-land based commercial radio, that's where my – I thought it would end up. I didn't. So Radio 1 opening up was pretty good because, I mean, it had national transmitters. So, and my ambition, I make no bones about it, was to try and be the number one. You know, I had – and this, I didn't have a gigantic ego, I've never had a gigantic ego, but I've got a certain amount of ego. And I quite liked the whole country, and now the world, thanks to the internet, to hear me [laughs].

Q: [0:49:07] Can I just go back to a specific moment, which is when you had that approach, Teddy Warwick, I think, in 1966, who approached you? Can you just sort of take us through what happened?

A: [0:49:16] Yes, I was at a Decca record reception. And Teddy Warwick appeared from behind a pillar. And [laughs], "Hello, your name's Tony Blackburn." He said, "My name's Teddy Warwick, I'm from the BBC. I'm

not really allowed to talk to you." Because they weren't allowed to. Record companies weren't allowed to be associated with us. And certainly not give us records, although, of course, they did, in vast quantities and, because they wanted them played. And Teddy Warwick said, "I'm not allowed, really, to talk to you, but if you ever wanted a job at the BBC..." This was about a year before Radio 1, he said, "There's a job here for you." And I said, "Oh, thank you very much." And I think he gave me the telephone number. And I never bothered to ring it because I didn't want to go to the BBC at that time, I was very happy. You know, I was twenty two years old or twenty one years old then and I was very happy being out on the North Sea. And I didn't see the BBC – I heard the BBC, and I thought there's nowhere, really, there that I'd sort of fit in, really. And so I didn't take him up on it. Although later on, you know, I liked Teddy Warwick very much and I became – he became quite a big part of my life then at Radio 1.

Q: [0:50:22] So just a little bit later, what – take us through the actual process of then, eventually being recruited. I mean, it's the shutting down of the pirates and the start of Radio 1. So it's just filling in the gap, if you like, between that first approach in 1966 and the 30 September 1967. What was the sort of chain of events that brought you, well, I suppose up to August and midday, the midday slot.

Q: [0:50:49] Well, we knew the Marine Offences Bill was going to possibly come through, which would make it more difficult to broadcast. Because then you were actually committing an offence against the British Government. And they were going to move the territorial waters about ten miles out. Well, they first of all made it illegal to advertise on the pirate radio stations. So it made it more difficult. And it made it – and also they said it was illegal to supply the ships with anything. So

obviously we got our food and stuff like that from Britain and they just had to come out on a tender boat. Whereas if – the Marine Offences Bill made it impossible for that to happen, to do it legally. So all the food would have to come from Holland or somewhere like that. And we would have to go off the ship via Holland as well. So it made it difficult. And we knew that Marine Offences Bill was, you know, coming through. In actual fact, the first commercial went out after the Marine Offences Bill, was for the Radio Times and British Airways, I think it was. So they made it a mockery right from the – I thought it was very clever and I thought it was very funny, it made me laugh. Because I heard it, and I thought, well, you know, how are they going to tell who's paying for the commercial and who isn't? You know, they hadn't – once again the politicians, as always, hadn't really thought it out. You know, Tony Benn, God bless him, you know, it was his job to try and get rid of us. And he did his best [laughs]. And I met him, you know, years later, and they tried to make out that we were a danger to shipping. Whereas all we did, actually, was a few people who floated out from Frinton on, you know, sort of rubber rings and things, we just pushed them back again. And we actually saved a lot of lives out there and we didn't interfere with any shipping. And I remember saying to Tony Benn, you know, "You said that we couldn't have commercial radio because there were no wavelengths." He said, "Well, how come, did you manufacture all these new wavelengths?" [Laughs] And he just laughed and he winked at me like that. He was doing an interview. So the Marine Offences Bill was going to go ahead. And so Tony Windsor, once again, he introduced me to someone called Harold Davison, who was one of the biggest agents in the country. And I met Harold Davison and we got on like a house on fire. And he eventually became like my second dad. And I loved him very much. And he was Harold – he was Frank Sinatra's agent. And he said to me, he said, "I've heard you on the pirate ships. I'd love to handle you and become your

manager." And he said, "I can make you the top disc jockey in three months." And I thought, ooh, that would be nice. And he said – I said, "Well, I'd love to, I'd love that, Harold, thank you very much." He said, "There is a – the BBC are going to be forced into providing popular music." And he said, "The rumour is that there's going to be station on." And he said, "I know they're very interested in you." So he said, "The time to come off is not just yet." But he said, "The time will be to come off before the Marine Offences Bill goes through because there'll be a mad rush and all the DJs will want to come off." He said, "Go out there. I'll tell you when to come off." And he did. And he took me off at the right time. And then he said, "Just to ease you into the BBC, they want you to go on the Light Programme and just do three quarters of an hour a week." Which I did. And that was it. And he introduced me to people at the BBC, Harold did. And he said to me, he said, "I'll handle your career." He put me with a great publicist called Leslie Perrin, who all the journalists knew. And this was to make me a, you know, into a name, if you like. And so he put the – he gave me the right – he said, "The secret of success, Tony, is to structure your career properly." And he said – and he introduced me to an accountant called Harold Waterman, who – and the Wright accountants, who I'm still with to this very day. And Les Perrin, who sadly passed away, but he was the publicist. And he made sure that everybody thought I was the best thing since sliced bread. I was in every newspaper. And he introduced me to everybody at the BBC. And he said, "I will handle your contracts and things like that." He said, "If there's any problems that you have at the BBC, you're always the nice person, I'm the bastard." [Laughs] And that is what a DJ is. He said, "You always – you go in there, no problem. If there's any problem you come to me, and I'll sort it out." And that's what he did. And he got me a five year contract at the BBC. And he just made me, you know.

Q: [0:55:33] And can I just ask a broader question, really, about the role of an agent. I mean, how important has – because, you know, since then you've had a lot of [inaudible 0:55:42]. In this whole broadcasting career how important is the agent in terms of your relationship with the BBC?

Q: [0:55:54] Um, It's very important, I think, very important. To have an agent that the BBC likes is quite important, a powerful agent. I think it's changed a lot. I mean, in the '60s there was the great organisation, and I was a part of that. And the great organisation were very powerful. I remember one occasion, for instance, Harold Davison, he wanted, he wanted me to have a – be paid more. And he had Kenny Everett and he had one or two other people he then was representing at the time. And the BBC didn't want to pay any more money. So he said, "Okay." He said, "I'll take all my DJs off Radio 1 and I'll buy Radio Luxembourg." [Laughs] Until commercial radio comes. And he was going to do it, you know. And they said, "Oh, alright, then." And they backed down. You know, so, and we were paid what he wanted us to be paid. To me, money's never been that important, funnily enough. But he did get me a very good pay thing, which was nice. But, yeah.

Q: [0:56:53] But did the fact that you had an agent representing you mean that, in a sense, you didn't really ever negotiate or have any dealings with senior management? In a way, that was all dealt with by your agent?

A: [0:57:05] Yes, I've never had dealings with senior management, to this day. I've never gone in and negotiated a contract. No, I just – the agent does that for me. And I wouldn't want to negotiate a contract. Although I tell my agent what I want now, more. I mean, we – I've got

a lovely agent who I've been with called Nick Canham for a long time now, and he's been wonderful to me. You know, we've been through tough times, which I don't talk about, obviously. But he was, you know, a stalwart there and he saw me through it. And so an agent's very important, I find, at any rate, yeah. Although, now I guide my own career much more than I did. I know where I'm going and what I want to do. So I might say, which I didn't with Harold at the time, because he knew where he wanted me to be and he had the power to get me on Top of the Pops and things like that. So I didn't have to bother about things like that. And at the time I was Radio 1, Top of the Pops, and then he got me my own television show and I was on Radio Luxembourg. And so, you know, he got me everything, that I didn't have to ask him for. Whereas now, I will say, probably, you know, "I wouldn't mind doing that." And Nick will sort it out for me if he can. And, generally speaking, he can. But the agent now doesn't have the power that they had in the '60s. The great organisation were enormously powerful and they were sort of like a monopoly. Which I loved, you know. Being a, you know, being – I don't believe in monopolies, but when you're a part of it it's very enjoyable, you know, to go on the air on Radio 1 and have twenty million people listening to you was great [laughs]. Although I don't believe in monopolies and I think it's good to have the choice. But I was a part of that monopoly and I enjoyed it a lot while I was part of it.

Q: [0:59:48] Yeah, yeah. Okay, we'll carry on, okay, alright. So we're now at the point where Radio 1 has been launched, it's now sort of running as a new entity. But I – and we've talked about the launch day itself, but I wanted to just talk a little bit about your first impressions of the BBC, actually. So, when you arrived, I suppose this is actually in August rather than in September, for that midday slot, when you arrived at the BBC for the first time, what was it like walking through the doors? The

sort of, the building, the people, the atmosphere? I wondered if you could sort of paint a portrait of your very first impressions.

A: [1:00:28] Well, I was first of all very excited to be joining the BBC. I remember seeing the building, old Broadcasting House, where we are in now. We didn't have the new Broadcasting House, so old Broadcasting House. And I looked at this enormous building, and I thought, how is it that so many people are in this building? Because I'd come from the pirate radio ships, where there were very few people operating the stations. But you come to a massive organisation like this, and I couldn't help but think, what do all these people do [laughs]? But then it was just a massive organisation. But the people that I met were really very, very nice, you know. They were very establishment people, much older than I was. And my first impression was, this is a big organisation. Totally different from the pirate ships, but very welcoming, the people were very, very nice, very gentlemanly, they treated you very nicely. And I remember, funnily enough, my first programme on the old Light Programme, I remember saying to some people out at the, on pirate ships, I thought, when I do my first programme at the BBC, I'm sure there'll be somebody sitting behind a glass and there'll be a dear old woman there knitting. And there was [laughs]. Her job was to open up the microphone for me, and she was knitting. And during the course of my programme she knitted half a sleeve of a jumper. And so that was the impression of the BBC. It was as I thought it would be, in a way.

Q: [1:02:01] And that was something that just felt a few years behind the times? Because this was 1967, I mean, like, it was the summer of love and so on. And yet the portrait you're suggesting is, very nice people but something a bit 1950s.

A: [1:02:16] Yeah, a little bit. But there were enough younger people there who wanted to surge ahead a little bit. And Derek Chinnery, who I've got a lot of time for, he was very, as a man I liked him a lot, he was very sort of establishment, a little bit, wore the right suits and bit kind of grand. Somebody that, really, I mean, I know preferred show music. So I remember going round to have dinner with him once and he had The Sound of Music there and things like that. Which I like, actually, as well. But not heavily into pop music. But he was – he was a very good controller for Radio 1, because he really did fight for us. And although not, I wouldn't have thought, a terrific pop fan, necessarily, himself, he was – you know, he went to the meetings and he represented us very well. And he was very – got heavily into Radio 1, I think. And because of him, I think, Radio 1 did very well. And then there was, behind him, Johnny Beerling and there was Doreen Davies.

Q: [1:03:10] I'm going to – I want to talk a little bit more about some of these people. Just one last question, really, about the general culture of the BBC. I mean, was it – so it wasn't really a culture shock? Because coming – I mean, you would imagine, you know, as an outsider, you can imagine a huge contrast between the pirate ship experience and then Broadcasting House.

A: [1:03:37] Well, it was, yeah, it was. I mean, it was totally different. But I thought, this is a place I can fit into quite nicely because the people are nice. I'm here to do what I was doing on the pirate ships but on a bigger basis, so I rather like it. You know, because the pirate stations, you know, I'd been out there for three years, I'd loved every moment of it. And I thought, this is something I'd going to also love. Because this is the start of something really exciting, something brand new, it's

something new for the BBC. So it wasn't like going into the Light Programme and fitting in around a load of comedy programmes and things like that. This is basically aimed at the audience that – we're aiming for a younger audience. So this is the BBC coming up to date. And we are here, they've, sensibly, got some of us youngsters in to show them how to do it. And they allowed us to do that. So I thought, this is an environment totally different to the pirates, but I like it very much. And I'd had – you know, the North Sea's fine, but I'm not a sailor. I liked it, I loved the North Sea and I love the sea. And I enjoyed the rough weather, but this is – I can now start having proper relationships with people and not be away at sea for nine months a year. This is more natural, you know. So therefore the BBC is a wonderful place to be.

Q: [1:04:55] So now's a good time to actually sort of talk a little bit about some of the people that you were – that were important in those early days. I just wanted to start off with Johnny Beerling, who was your first producer at Radio 1. Just tell us a little bit about him, how you saw him and what sort of – what he was like.

A: [1:05:15] Johnny was a lovely person. He wasn't, eventually, the greatest help to me because he came from the other side. There were two – the funny thing about Radio 1 was that you came from what they call the gramophone department, which was Doreen Davies. And she was my executive producer. Johnny Beerling was from the Aeolian Hall side, which was the live music more. So he was much more the live music department, more. So, although Johnny Beerling was my first producer, he wasn't my first producer for, as I remember, for very long. Tim Blackmore became my producer eventually. And he was from the, I believe, the gramophone side. So I was

gramophone and Johnny was – Johnny was from the live music side more. So he associated more with the live music brigade. And they were – it was like a separate company more than anything else. And so eventually I was – I was more with the, you know, Doreen Davies side. Rather like the Radio Caroline time, when I was hired by Ronan O' Rahilly as a disc jockey. And Allan Crawford, who actually was the real person that started pirate radio properly. That's another story altogether. He hired me as a singer. So when Ronan O' Rahilly became more powerful than Allan Crawford, he'd sack all the people that Allan Crawford had hired, and vice versa. It didn't bother to me because they'd both hired me, that was the luck of it. So Doreen Davies was my main thing and Derek Chinnery. So I was much closer to Doreen Davies at the time.

Q: [1:06:56] So I want to ask about Doreen Davies and Tim Blackmore and Derek Chinnery. Just before I do, though, just in terms of that new element of your programme, which was the producer behind the glass screen as it were, or the woman with the knitting and the [laughs]. I mean, were there sort of any fairly immediate irritations with that sense of other people sort of involved in the programme?

A: [1:07:22] Oh yes, yeah, very much so.

Q: [1:07:23] I wonder if you could sort of, you know, identify a few sort of flashpoints.

A: [1:07:26] Yeah, I hated having a producer in the studio with me because they were an annoyance. I mean – I mean, they didn't understand that it was an annoyance to start off with. And so to start

off with, Johnny Beerling would stand there with a stopwatch. And I thought, why is he doing that? Because I'm letting the record go, and he was anticipating when I was going to stop speaking. And then he'd signal to me. And I thought – because I like to be in the studio by myself, I don't like any distraction. So eventually I had a word with Robin Scott, who was the controller, and he said, "Is everything going well?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "I do find it a little bit difficult having somebody in the studio with me." And I remember, at one time I had a very nice lady, who was in the studio, and she was always on the phone. And when I was putting the microphone on, I had to say to her, "Can you be quiet just for a minute because I'm going to do the broadcast." And she said, "Oh yes, sorry, dear." [Laughs] And so I had to get the producer moved out of the studio. And Robin Scott said, "Well, I will, you know, make sure that it happens to you." So eventually the studio – the producer was, you know, over the other side of the studio. And eventually the producer didn't bother to come in because it was very early in the morning. And so I used to just get the box of records, take them in and that was it. But it was quite pointless. I mean, the producer at one time, when they were behind the glass, they used to signal to you to, you know, to stop talking and the record was coming up. But it was quite pointless when you were ad libbing because I was the only one who knew when I was going to stop talking.

Q: [1:08:58] And that sort of change of, in a sense, getting the producer out of your hair, that was done quite quickly with Robin Scott?

A: [1:09:06] Yes, it was, yeah. Because we – because we were pirate disc jockeys we weren't used to having people telling us, "Do this and do that." And it wasn't necessary. So that job had become, basically,

obscure, really. I mean, there was no point to it. So I worked with a producer from the point of view of selecting the music. But the producer then didn't really come into the studio and, you know, become a part of that programme. It was just basically there for – to select music. In actual fact, to be honest with you, it was one of those things, the BBC represented, you know, the producer role in Radio 1 was – it wasn't really necessary, I don't think, dare I say [laughs].

Q: [1:09:51] Okay, I'm going to sort of mention –

A: [1:09:53] Now, it's slightly different because, you know, if you have phone calls and things like that, that's different because the producer lines up guests and things like that. That's slightly different now. But in – I mean, if you take – if you take Sounds of the 60s, as I do now, I select the music with my friend Phil Swern and we do that. And the BBC likes to have a producer there, but they don't interfere with what I do when I do the actual programme.

Q: [1:10:20] I just want to mention a few other names. Tim Blackmore, I wondered if you could talk to me about what it was like working with him.

A: [1:10:25] Tim, yeah, Tim was – Tim was – we selected the music together and things like that. Tim, lovely guy, you know. Once again, you know, we'd select the music together and then I'd go and do the programme. And Tim then became – he left and went to commercial radio and he became a big thing in – I – he said that I taught him how [laughs] – I said that, at one stage, once again, slightly arrogantly, said that I taught Tim Blackmore everything he knows about radio. And he

quoted that in his book. But it is true [laughs]. I gave him the top forty system. I remember saying to Tim, "I want to do the breakfast show like we did on the pirate radio ships." In other words and I said to him, "This is the way we do it, you know, one to ten, eleven to forty, climber." And we did it exactly like that. So I taught Tim. I didn't teach him how to do radio, I'd learnt that from the pirate ships. But I said to Tim, I said, "Let's do it this way. Let's be the programme that does actually do the top forty radio show properly." So we made up our own top forty list independently from what was the top forty in the country. And I said, "We do it this way." So I did do it that way, and I said, "That's the way we must do it." And I said, "It was enormously successful on the pirate ships and it will be successful here." And it was. And so I did say that in an article, and he always quoted me. And I said to him, I said, "Did I, honestly?" I said, "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to be that arrogant." And he said, "Oh no, you did." So I said, "Oh, thank you." But I said, "I shouldn't have, probably, said it."

Q: [1:12:03] Can you talk a little bit about Doreen Davies?

A: [1:12:06] Doreen was like the mother figure, really, at Radio 1. She was very sweet and she made sure we were all very – she was very – she was very BBC, very BBC. She wore a lovely rose on her [laughs] she was very BBC and she was always very lovely. And I remember on a road show, she used to come with us on road shows –

Q: [1:12:24] What, exactly, was her role, though, perhaps you can just clarify what her...?

A: [1:12:28] Well, I suppose to just make sure that it all went well. She was the link between me and the engineers and things like that. So she was there and she was like somebody who made sure that we were all alright, you know, when I was doing the road show. And I remember on one road show, she always smoked very heavily and she had a big handbag. And I remember, there was a record playing on the thing, and she put her handbag down on the [laughs]... And sometimes with the producers in those days, they were always smoking, they smoked a lot, and the ash would go on the records, and we had to keep the records away from the producers who smoked. Because it didn't do the records any good and they start sticking and things like that. So, but she was lovely, I mean, Doreen, you know, she's a really lovely person. But she was one of the executive producers, one of the layers of management, really.

Q: [1:13:19] Robin Scott was the, you know, the first controller, controller of both 1 and 2 at that stage.

A: [1:13:26] Radio 1 and 2, yes.

Q: [1:13:26] I just wonder if you could, you know, give a bit of a sketch of what he was like as a person, someone to work for and [inaudible 01:12:34]

A: [1:13:35] Well, you know, Robin Scott was one of the higher management. I didn't really see a lot of him. But, when I was – we were opening up Radio 1 he was absolutely adorable, you know. I loved him as a person, very kind, very gentle man and very BBC. And just –

Q: [1:13:51] And, when you say very BBC, what do you mean in that particular...?

A: [1:13:54] Just very, I don't know how you can say it, really. Very cultural, very public school, I thought, I think he went to a public school. And very standard BBC person. But a very nice person, very go-ahead, I think. When he was given that job, he knew what he wanted and, you know, he made sure it happened.

Q: [1:14:15] But was he someone who liked pop music and, I mean – or was it the case that he just saw that – he recognised that his job was to deliver pop music, but he wasn't necessarily a pop [both talking at once]?

A: [1:14:27] I wouldn't have seen him as a pop fan, necessarily, I don't think so. I mean, with a lot of upper management they are really there for meetings. And that's why [laughs] meetings and waving off politicians and things like that, you know, being – representing the BBC. I think, when you get to that particular role in life, you get taken away from the everyday running of the BBC and you have people below you, you know, in charge of this, that and the other. And there's meeting after meeting after meeting.

Q: [1:14:57] But you felt that with Robin Scott, he was someone who cared about [both talking at once]?

A: [1:15:00] Oh yes, yes. He wanted it to be successful, very much so. And I think he thought that he'd got the right team there. And it was very important to him that Radio 1 was successful. And when he – when he was asked about me, I only found this out recently, he said, you know, he said, "Tony Blackburn, excellent." And that was it, that was – at the meeting he said, "Excellent, just what we wanted." And that was it, there was no criticism or anything. And I only met him a few times, but whenever I met him he was really, really nice. You know, and I thought he was, as a person I didn't know what his job was. His job was, basically, I think, you know, going to probably the Chairman of Governors and this sort of thing things and representing the BBC and staving off any criticism and saying the right things. That's what the BBC does, isn't it, really, upper management, I don't know, that's what the Director Generals job is, isn't it, you know. Basically, you know, mix with the MPs and people like that and make sure the licence fee keeps going, that's their level. That's what they do, as far as I know. I've never been really, you know, privvy to what they do.

Q: [1:16:14] Just one last name at this stage. We'll come back to some other ones later. Derek Chinnery, I mean, you mentioned briefly earlier. But I wonder if you could sort of give a bit more of a sketch of him as a person.

A: [1:16:24] Yeah, Derek was, Derek, I thought he fought very highly for Radio 1. He was quite stern, you know, he was like a schoolmaster, he was like a head schoolmaster. And quite often, if I'd said something wrong the red phone would go, "Hello, Tony. Come and see me after the programme." You'd go in there and, you know, it was like a headmaster, really. And, "I believe you said, you know, in an article you said this." And I'd always say the same, you know, "I've been

misquoted, Derek." He said, "This article it's not a good article for the BBC." Or something like that. I might have said something, that was nothing nowadays, but I might have said something, that I'd probably said. And I always said to him, "Derek, I never said that." He said, "You never said it?" I said, "No." "Alright, then, fine." And, of course, I had [laughs] I had said it. So he was the one who kept us in line, if you like. You know, the red phone used to go, "Oh God." You know. Derek, "Can you come and see me afterwards." Oh, what have I done wrong? But it wasn't as bad as that. But, I mean, he was – he was like a headmaster figure. But he – yeah, we got on really well, we got on very well, I liked him a lot.

Q: [1:17:42] And do you think the kind of people like Derek Chinnery and some of the other producers and so on, who were kind of BBC figures, that they were genuinely willing to learn from you as a sort of, as a pirate, someone who had a very clear vision of what pop radio should be?

A: [1:17:58] I don't think they'd ever admit that they learnt from us. They just let us get on with it. So I like to think that, as they let us get on with it, they just let us get on with it because they knew that we knew how to do it. So I think we knew more about popular music radio than they did. And they were the figurehead that kept it going and they were the ones that – they were the establishment, and they were the management, management, really, that we had to get along with. And it wasn't difficult to get along with them because they were very agreeable. But I think that they weren't necessarily pop fans in those days. No, I think they were more interested in the running of the station more. And they just let those, "Those disc jockeys, they'll get on with it, you know, they know what they're doing, they, more or less, know what

they're doing." And so it wouldn't – I think we all learnt from one another a little bit. I think we learnt the way that the BBC run and things like that, and that's it. And you worked within the confines of it. But I don't think there was any – I never felt that I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that. I had a lot of freedom, a lot of freedom. And I still do, and I think that's the great thing about the BBC. You have far more freedom on the BBC than you do on any commercial radio station.

Q: [1:19:13] There were sort of other behind-the-scenes staff as well. The sort of the typists, the secretaries and so on.

A: [1:19:20] Yes.

Q: [1:19:20] The kind of people who, in many ways, whose work might get overlooked in a lot of kind of official histories.

Q: [1:19:24] Yes.

Q: [1:19:26] I mean, how important were they, do you think, to the kind of smooth running of Radio 1?

A: [1:19:31] Oh, I think, I mean, Radio 1, like any organisation, it's a cog in a wheel, isn't it. You know, I mean, a DJ's a cog in that wheel and there are some smaller cogs, there are some bigger cogs. And there are some bloomin' awkward cogs [laughs]. And so, but everybody got on well together. It was a lovely atmosphere there, you know, it really was. It wasn't the same atmosphere that we had on the pirate ships because we all lived together there. So quite often, you know, I

wouldn't see the other DJs very much. We'd meet up for, if we had meetings or something like that. But we were all doing our other things, you know. I mean, I'd do Radio 1, then I'd go off and do some work on Radio Luxembourg because I was working for them at the same time. Then I'd dash down to Southampton to do my TV show, I'd be doing Top of the Pops, and doing various gigs up and down the country as well, and discos. So I was really, really, very, very busy. And so we didn't actually socialise very much with the other disc jockeys.

Q: [1:20:29] I mean, you said the atmosphere was generally quite good. But apart from those sort of early days of sort of people being in the studio on the telephone or whatever, what were the sort of – were there any sort of irritations that sort of worried you more deeply? Sort of any, you know, working for the BBC, working for Radio 1, working with the various people. I mean, you said, I mean, I'm quoting your own words here, in your autobiography you – that you, when you come up against, quotes, "Cold, monolithic establishments, that your disobedient streak emerges."

A: [1:21:03] [Laughs].

Q: [1:21:04] But it didn't really sort of happen very much on the Radio 1.

A: [1:21:08] No.

Q: [1:21:09] You weren't being particularly rebellious, I get that impression.

A: [1:21:12] No, I wasn't, I wasn't that rebellious. I don't like establishment very much, if you like. I find, you know, the establishment, they all stick together a little bit. And it can be them against us. But it was never like that. I didn't get that feeling with Radio 1. I thought the – I didn't even see them as establishment, really. They were producers and they were a part of the layer of BBC management. And you've got to have a management that runs something. Sometimes some of the decisions they made, I thought weren't probably the best. But, normally speaking, it was great. I mean, we had the Radio 1 road shows going, and they came in and did the – I mean, what we're doing is not brain surgery here, is it. We're going on, we're talking in between the records and trying to make people happy. That's what – that's always what I've felt. So I didn't really feel it was us against them, no, at no stage at all. They were very easy going. And sometimes we had to be told off for something we might have done. Mainly, we got into trouble more than anything else with the press. You know, we'd give this press articles and things like that, and sometimes we'd say something we wish we hadn't said. And then we got into trouble for it. I mean, and that was it. You know, I mean, I was interviewed a lot. And I probably didn't know then how to handle the press like I do now. I mean, now, if I do interviews, I've been doing quite a few of them for the fiftieth anniversary, I know exactly what a journalist wants me to say. And I'll either give it to them or I won't give it to them. But in the early days I gave it to them [laughs]. And I didn't – I wasn't as subtle as I can be now. So I'm more coached in the BBC ways, I know what the BBC wants, I know what the journalists want. And when I'm working for the BBC, I'll tend to give what the BBC wants more than what the journalists want.

Q: [1:23:07] And in terms of sort of on air, because you had political viewpoints, you had political opinions and so on.

A: [1:23:12] Yeah.

Q: [1:23:13] But what you're saying is that, in a sense, you knew what the restrictions were and what the sense of behaviour was on air. If there were any mistakes it was actually not so much on air, but conversations with the press or interviews with the press.

A: [1:23:27] Yeah.

Q: [1:23:28] And that's what the BBC reacted to.

A: [1:23:29] Yeah, I've never – I've never got into politics, from the point of view of expressing my own views on air. I've been asked to join parties, you know, in the past and I never have done because, I mean, I know exactly what I am, and probably people guess probably what party I vote for. But I've never done that because you alienate half your audience. And also, I'm not there to express my political opinions. I actually have got very strong political opinions and I – most of my viewing, a lot of my viewing is done to the news channels and I'm very interested in politics. But I – and, but I'm not interested in bringing it into my programmes, because that's not what I'm all about.

Q: [1:24:08] So there wasn't any real row or pressure or arguments, that wasn't an irritation with your senior managers, that you wanted to be, wanted to say a bit more but [both talking at once]?

A: [1:24:20] Well, I've always been, yeah, I've always had a slight thing about unions. I don't like unions very much. I don't like some of the,

you know, the unions. And I got into trouble with the miners' strike, where I told [laughs] – I advised the miners to go back to work.

Q: [1:24:38] This was the 1970s miners' strike, or the 1980s?

A: [1:24:41] Yeah, and, actually, the reason why I wanted them to go back to work was that, every year the electricity kept going out. You know, there was always a strike happening and the electricity would go out. And I used to do pantomimes around Christmas [laughs]. And it affected my pantomimes because, you know, you'd be in the middle of a scene and suddenly the light – you'd be plunged into darkness, and before we got generators. And so once, I suggested to the miners that they might like to go back to work, you know, fed up with the strike. And, of course, I got taken off the air for that. And quite rightfully so as well. And Malcom Muggeridge at the time, he was – or was it Douglas? No Douglas Muggeridge, sorry, Douglas Muggeridge, he – very nice, and he said, "You know, you shouldn't have done that." I said, "I know I shouldn't have done it." He said, "I don't want to, but I'm going to have to take you off the air for a couple of weeks." He said, "Can you, go away on a holiday and then come back." So...

Q: [1:25:34] So you knew and understood that you'd transgressed?

A: [1:25:36] Oh yes, yeah.

Q: [1:25:36] And he knew, and it was all dealt with in a kind of civilized –

A: [1:25:40] Oh yes, he was quite right, I mean, he was quite right. I mean, that was it, one time, I went overboard on that and it was wrong and I made a mistake. And he was quite right to take me off. And so I went home. And then the journalists found out where I was. And I said – I rung up the BBC, and I said, "There's a load of journalists outside." And one of the producers, I can't [inaudible 01:25:59] said, "Make out you've got a sore throat." Because they didn't say that they'd taken me off for any reason, they said that I'd gone away on holiday. So I went to – I went and answered it, and I said [in soft voice], "I'm sorry, I can't talk." And then I shut the door. And Doug – and one of them said, "Can't you go on holiday, go away on holiday." And I couldn't book up a holiday, they were all – it was in the winter or something and all – it was at a time when you just couldn't book up, everything was booked up. So then they brought me back early, and said, "Oh, for God's sake, just come back." And [laughs] I was only off the air for a week, I think it was. And I apologised, I did say I was sorry. Because I'd done something wrong there, yeah, fair enough. So I've never felt that, you know, I mean, in the early days that I was take – you know, if I was told off by Derek Chinnery, he was probably right, you know. And I wiggled my way out of it every time.

Q: [1:26:49] But by and large it wasn't an issue, because you felt that that wasn't really what your show was ever about?

A: [1:26:54] No, no, I mean, I wasn't, no, all I – and still to this day, my job is to entertain people and to try and make people laugh and be silly or something like that, and play good music. I think, in the early days people didn't realise how important the music was. Because I was – this is where I got in trouble with – I mean, John Peel was snobbish about music, I always felt. And he couldn't stand me. I actually quite

liked him. But John Peel was more the, you know, looked down on his nose at us popularist broadcasters. And I couldn't understand why he did that, you know. To me, you know, go on playing your weird stuff [laughs] but keep out – you know, and that was it. But he took it very personally with me, I don't know why that was.

Q: [1:27:35] So I wanted to talk a little bit about kind of what it was like to kind of be a celebrity in those days. Because you were a huge public figure. You know, not just Radio 1 was getting attention, but, you know, the breakfast show, the breakfast show. And there were, you know, there were pluggers, there were press, there were party invitations, there were young women.

A: [1:27:58] Yes. You've read my book [laughs].

Q: [1:28:00] [Laughs] Yes. So, I mean, was, you know, was that fun or was it a bit claustrophobic?

A: [1:28:06] Um, well, it was fun, it was fun, it was claustrophobic as well. It was – I mean, the Radio 1 DJs in that time were as big as the pop stars, that's the truth of it. It's very strange to think it. But, I mean, I remember going and opening up a clothes shop in, I think it was Edinburgh or something like that. Dropped the wrong side of the road and there were loads of police there to make sure I got into the thing. And I had my jacket ripped off. And I came out of the clothes shop with a better jacket than I'd gone in with. And, in fact – and you used to get mobbed everywhere, I mean, everywhere you went. And the combination of Radio 1 and Top of the Pops, because then I was visually known, as a lot of us were. And it was incredible, yes, we were

built up as pop stars. And I also had a couple of records out as well, so I was appearing as a singer on things like Dee Time and things like that. So it was, it was very enjoyable being a personality. But I never let it go to my head. I learnt from Simon Dee, actually, he couldn't handle success. And I learnt a lot from him, how not to do it, in a way. He had everything going for him. He was an enormously famous broadcaster and very good at what he did. But he couldn't handle the success. He believed all his publicity, you know, he believed that he was the greatest thing since sliced bread. And, if I believed everything that they printed about me in the papers in the early days, I'd have a head that size. And, but Harold Davison was there, and he said, you know, "Keep your feet firmly on the ground and you'll be okay." But I've always enjoyed – I've always enjoyed the stardom of it, if you like. I aim to be number one, and I did achieve that. Not now, but I did achieve it at the time. And I enjoyed every moment of it. But it is a lonely place to be as well because you never know who's going out with you for the right reasons. I was quite lonely during that time because I was travelling around the country, appearing everywhere. And I always used to laugh at people who said they were working so hard they had a blackout. Well, I did, actually, on one occasion. I've only ever missed one disco that I was a part of. And I was – the phone rang and I was in, I forget where I was, Earl's Court, I think it was, in a bedsit in Earl's Court. And I was [inaudible 01:30:37] and I had passed out through just lack of sleep. And there was one week, I totalled it up, and I was only able to sleep for about ten hours because I was working the whole time, working and working and working. And Harold said, "Take it while it's there, it won't always be there."

Q: [1:30:54] So there was, in that sense, there was a pressure, not necessarily from the BBC, but a sort of drive to live fast, do lots –

A: [1:31:03] Yes.

Q: [1:31:04] And that caught up with you?

A: [1:31:06] It did catch up with me eventually, yeah. I mean, I was young and I was fit and I could do it all, and I was enjoying it. But at the same time there was a lot of travelling. And I was going – I mean, I remember going down to Frome in Somerset and there was a guy who was promoting stuff there. And I'd do three discos on one night. I'd go from one to another, and doing that. And then coming back and being on the air and things like that. And it was – it was a lot of pressure. And so it did get on top of me at one time. And I had to just ease back on it because I was – I did pass out. And, you know, I was – you know, Harold said, you know, "Perhaps we're overdoing it a little bit. Take it easy."

Q: [1:31:46] And you mentioned that sort of Harold mentioned that. What about the sort of BBC or Radio 1, were they sort of managing your kind of public profile in any way? Were they sort of looking after you?

A: [1:31:59] Um, I don't remember them looking after me as such. It was really Harold that was looking after me. And, I mean, I went in and did the radio shows and that was it. And I don't think that they – it was their interest, my welfare, particularly. Because when I went in to do the show I did it as best I could. And I made sure that I wasn't over tired to do those shows. So I managed to do those. But it was the combination of doing those shows, then I'd dash off and do my television show. And I was also, on my show I was singing, so I had to learn words. And I remember, on one occasion when I was doing the

television show, I got on there and I couldn't remember any of the words. And we didn't have autocue in those days. And so it was pretty obvious that I was overdoing it, and so I just had to ease back on it a little bit. But I made sure that I always did the radio show the best that I possibly – well, everything I did, that I wanted to do well. But I was pushing it a little bit, I think, you know, and I was being pushed, you know. But I was earning a lot of money as well, doing it, so [laughs] that was it. But I wasn't driven by the money. I was driven by the fact that, you know, Harold said to me, he said, "It won't always be there, take it while you can." I very nearly got married, and he said, "Ooh, don't do that because you've got your, you know, young fans, girl fans, they won't like that." And in the days when they wouldn't accept the fact that you'd got a girlfriend or something like that. So my private life was very, very private, you know.

Q: [1:33:29] And it was – your agent very explicitly said, you know, "Don't get married?"

A: [1:33:35] Yeah.

Q: [1:33:35] The sort of the single man about town image was actually quite important [both talking at once]?

A: [1:33:39] Yeah, and I put that relationship – my career ahead of that relationship. And it was someone I was very fond of. But I thought, do I want stardom, if you like, and want to keep going, or do I want to be happily married. And I put my career first. Ooh, how hard of me. But that's what I wanted, I'm very focused. And I still am to this day. Funnily enough, I'm seventy four now, and still I'm really, I'm still ambitious. I

don't know what for [laughs]. But I am, you know, I want – and if there's something that isn't right, I want it right, you know. And still, to this day, I want to do more things. You know, I'm not happy just doing what I'm doing now, I get something that I want, and I want something else. I'm still ambitious. And it's very tiring, it's very tiring, that.

Q: [1:34:25] I want to talk about Top of the Pops. And I wondered whether television was ever the next logical step in your mind. You know, because you said you were ambitious. So, I mean, a lot of people would think, you know, think, well, radio is a stepping stone to television, Top of the Pops. And television was actually going to be the future. Or was it really always in your mind something that was just going to be alongside radio?

A: [1:34:57] Radio I would never have wanted to – if you take Noel Edmonds, for instance, he was more interested in television. Radio – he's very, very good on both. There are very few people who are good on both, I think, television and radio. Graham Norton's excellent at both. I'm much better on radio. I've got better on television now, but it's too late [laughs]. Because I don't have that natural ability to – confidence in yourself, confidence in your being, if you like. Noel always was, he was always very confident, "I'm here." And I didn't have that confidence that he had. So therefore to be confident on television is very important.

Q: [1:35:34] So what was it like doing Top of the Pops, then, without that [both talking at once]?

A: [1:35:38] I didn't – it's a very important show to do, but I didn't really enjoy – it's not my sort of programme. I don't like being surrounded by people. I was shyer in those days than I was. So being surrounded by people, and you're in the middle of doing a link and there's somebody waving to their mum in front of you. It's slightly off-putting. So Top of the Pops was never a natural one for me. Although it was very important to be on it. And I've watched myself back on it, and I was better on it than I thought I was, funnily enough. I didn't think I was very good on it. But I look back, on BBC Four, they're playing a lot of them. And I was – I was better than I thought, I was more acceptable than I thought I was. So, if I'd realised that I was not too bad on it, I'd have been better on it, I think, and probably gone on to do more TV. But nobody really saw me. I wanted to do more, just better things on TV, really. But I was such a disc jockey, I am a – you know, when you think, if anybody does bother to think about me, it is the disc jockey, you know, the cheesy sort of disc jockey, sort of thing. I think, nowadays it's – nowadays I prefer people the way they – I mean, I don't sit here thinking, how are people thinking about me? Because I'm sure people have got much better things to do with their life than think about me. But I think people realise now that music is really important to me. And, I think, in the early days I was more of a performer, and they didn't realise that I did choose the music and I loved soul music and Motown and Philadelphia. And I pushed that music forward much more. So that was really important to me, to push that sort of music, because I loved it. And, when I came to the BBC, I realised how little black soul music they were playing, and I changed that. And John Peel gave me credit for that behind the scenes. He said to me, he said, he said, "People don't realise how much you've done for soul music in your music." I said, "John, would you say that publicly?" He said, "Oh, course not." [Laughs]. So we got on, actually, alright together.

Q: [1:37:42] And just by way of talking about John Peel, it strikes me, I want to kind of ask a kind of devil's advocate question, really, which is, it strikes me that, in many ways – I know you said that, you know, your feeling from a long time was John Peel sort of looking down his nose at the kind of popular end of music. But here, let me try this idea out on you, which is that, in many ways you and John Peel were very similar.

A: [1:38:07] Yeah.

Q: [1:38:08] In terms of actually being supreme examples of public service broadcasting. Because what you were doing, was that you were both, in your different ways, very – you were very passionate about certain kinds of music. And you were trying to bring your passion, to use that passion to bring that music to a wider audience in some way.

A: [1:38:29] Yes.

Q: [1:38:29] I mean, so – I mean, would it be fair to say that in that respect, perhaps, you and John Peel were similar?

A: [1:38:34] I think we were very similar. I accepted that, but I don't think he would. I mean, I remember John Peel coming to Radio London, Big L, Radio London on the pirate ships. And he'd been – he'd had a certain amount of success in America as a pop disc jockey. And, basically because he had that English voice. And he had a totally different voice to the one that he had on – at the pirate stations. That wasn't his voice. He was a public schoolboy. He came from a very establishment family. Although he wouldn't like people to know that. And I'm sorry, John for giving this away, but I'm going to give away a

little bit about him now. Because when I – he came to Radio London, and he realised that he wasn't really a very good top forty disc jockey. We were better than him, than that. So one day I went down to the studio, and there were these joss sticks and things, and all this funny smelling stuff. And he'd taken on board some really odd music. And he said to me, he said, "This music is absolute rubbish." But he said, "I can make a programme out of this." And he turned it into The Perfumed Garden. Now, when he started this programme, he realised it wasn't very good. But he became an expert on it. And he then, I think, started enjoying it, and he got into it more. But he said to me, he said, "This music is weird, and it's abs... I don't understand it, really, it's rubbish." Like, I did a big band programme on Radio Caroline, knew nothing about it. But I was reading the sleeve covers, and, you know, "Here's Johnny so and so on base." And I had loads of letters saying, isn't it lovely to have a young guy who knows a lot about big band music. I knew nothing about it, but I was reading it. And John was the same in the early days. Then he got heavily into it. But in the early days, The Perfumed Garden, he created that programme because he wasn't a very good top forty disc jockey. But he then became passionate about the music, as I was passionate about soul music. And he appreciated it and I appreciated it. And I always – never had a thing about John Peel. But I think he resented the fact that we were pushed as celebrities more than he was, I think. You know, he was more the left wing side of the thing, you know, he appealed more to the students than we did. I was going for the family audience, and I always have done. And I couldn't understand why he was so against me. And in fact, in the later days, when we had a thirtieth anniversary of Radio 1, the picture, the famous picture, and there weren't quite so many of us, I was on Capital Radio, and I – they wanted to do the picture, the BBC wanted to do the picture, I wasn't working for them, at four o'clock in the afternoon. And I was on the air till four. And I said to

the BBC press department, I said, "Could you delay the programme, sorry, the photograph until about half past four, because I don't want to keep everybody waiting." So they said, "Oh no, we'll get a cab for you." And they did, and it got caught up in traffic. And so I bowled in, and I said, you know, "Sorry to have kept you all waiting but I've been working." And so it was a joke. And John Peel wrote, "Tony Blackburn did the usual thing, came in as the big star and kept us all waiting." Now, it wasn't like that at all. He knew it, and he just – he just wanted to continually have a go at me. And so I sent him an email, saying, "John, we're both over sixty years old now. For God's sake, bury the hatchet. You know, I don't feel anything towards you." But he never replied to it. But when he passed away, I was in – I was abroad on holiday, and a journalist rang me up, saying would I like to say something about John Peel. And I said, "Well, I didn't know him that well." And I put my phone off. Because I didn't want to be insincere, and say whatever, as everybody, you know, what a wonderful guy he was. I thought he was a really good broadcaster of that time. To be honest with you, I never heard any of his programmes, I didn't listen to it because it's not my sort of music. I never – I heard about ten minutes or something, it wasn't for me. But he was very important to that sort of music. And all the people that he championed, they all said the same thing about him. They said, "The trouble is, he found us and then when we became popular, he dropped us." And that – and they sort of resented him. In other words he – whereas with me I would always, you know, if I found somebody I would always want to stick with them. You know, like Luther Vandross, Alexander O' Neal and these sort of people, you know, some of the soul acts that weren't getting played, like Five Star and people like that. I always wanted to – you know, I was really so happy the fact that we'd got, you know, helped them along.

Q: [1:43:15] Just, I want to ask one last question, which is about this sort of celebrity status. Which is, I mean, we know that there's that, you know, what's emerged is the kind of darker side to that. And I don't want to specifically ask you about Jimmy Savile, but one of the things that sort of emerged in discussing what happened back then is a sort of anxiety about the atmosphere of the time, whether or not there was a kind of an atmosphere in which that kind of behaviour was possible, was tolerated. I wondered if you could kind of cast your mind back and kind of, you know, give your own sense of what that kind of atmosphere was. Whether or not there was that sense of that kind of behaviour in the air or anxieties or worries?

A: [1:44:03] Um, yes, I mean, I think it's – with Savile I always, never liked him. I found him very odd. I thought his broadcasting was awful. I thought the programmes he did – I could never understand why the BBC ever employed him. Because he was atrocious, I think, as a broadcaster. I didn't like him very much as a person, I always thought – and if anybody says that they didn't think there was anything wrong with Jimmy Savile, they're lying. And I read in – that management didn't know that there was anything wrong. They did, of course they did. Everybody – I never saw him do anything wrong. I just heard all the rumours, and that was it. I didn't realise how bad he was until I read all about him. And there were – when he was around at Top of the Pops, I didn't like the atmosphere very much, no.

Q: [1:44:58] And do you think it was – so in a sense it was sort of him, it wasn't actually a broader atmosphere of...?

A: [1:45:02] No, no, no, it was him, it was him. And what he represented, to me, wasn't right. I mean, I remember him once saying at Top of the

Pops, "I is..." He always talked like that, "I is going to do so much charity work this year, they is going to have to make me – give me an OBE." And he did it, you know. It was all calculated, everything he did was calculated. And I detested that, and I hated everything about it. And I think he has damaged that era to a very large extent. Not for those of us who were a part of it. But there's so much written about it, and it wasn't like that. It was enormous fun, it was great, but Savile spoilt it. But he didn't spoil it for us, because we very rarely saw him. But when I was with him, I didn't like him at all. I detested him as a person. So when he passed away, the BBC asked me to do a tribute to him, and I said, "I didn't know him that well." And I'd just finished doing the Pick of the Pops, and the press department rung me up, and said would I like to pay tribute to Jimmy Savile, and I said, "Well, I'd rather not." And they said to me, "I know what you mean." And I was cornered by ITV as I came out of Wogan House, as it is now, it was Western House at one time, and I just said, I said, "Well, I didn't know him very well. But you've got to admire somebody who makes a career out of going, "Oh-oh-oh-oh." [laughs] and that was it. But I, no, I purposely avoided anything to do with that, yeah. But, I mean, I never saw anything wrong, I never saw him do anything wrong. But I was aware that he wasn't quite right, no.

Q: [1:46:39] I just want to come – so I want to come back now to the sort of later years of Radio 1, the sort of evolving story. Because 1973, after six years you're shifted to the mid morning.

A: [1:46:52] Yes.

Q: [1:46:54] How did you sort of react to that?

A: [1:46:56] Quite badly [laughs]. Um, it was a sensible thing for Radio 1 to do. I'd done five years on the breakfast show and I was now married, my first wife, and we had a baby. And there was this very annoying young person, very good looking young person called Noel Edmonds, who was five years younger than I was, and he was very good. And very annoying from my point of view. Because you don't want a younger person than you who's very good. If have a younger person than you that comes along, and he's not that good, it's fair enough. Noel was very good and he was the obvious person to take over the breakfast show. And I didn't want him to take over the breakfast show, and I think I was a bit frosty towards him in the early stages. And he was very aware that he wanted my breakfast show and he was a very determined young man. And he was determined to get it and I was determined that he wasn't going to get it. But, unfortunately he had youth on his side. And he got it, and that was it. So I moved on to the mid mornings, which was okay and that was fine. But, for me, my happiest times at Radio 1 was doing the breakfast show. And I was – it wasn't fair, I was frosty towards Noel. And so I did eventually apologise to him, because I went on his House Party. He invited me on the House Party when – the television show he used to do on the BBC, which was enormously successful and he was very good on. And you'd come to the door and he'd have celebrities coming to the door. And we'd deliver a line to him and he'd slam the door. And I delivered a line to him on the first time I was on it. He slammed the door and he turned to the camera, and he said, "I've wanted to do that for years because he insulted me." And, jokingly. And in the green room afterwards I said to Noel, I said, "You really meant that, didn't you?" And he said, "I really did." And from that moment on we became the best of friends and, you know, I got to know him really, really well. And, but it was the rivalry and, fair enough, you know, it was the rivalry in those days. And

he was the obvious one to do it, do the breakfast show and he did it terribly, terribly well, very successfully.

Q: [1:49:09] And every few years Radio 1 would kind of change the schedules and –

A: [1:49:11] And I'd go down the running order, is what you're saying. Yes, you're absolutely right.

Q: [1:49:13] Well, I mean –

A: [1:49:15] No, no, that's the –

Q: [1:48:16] You were shifted to the afternoons.

A: [1:49:17] No, of course, afternoons.

Q: [1:49:17] And then [inaudible 01:49:18] the weekends.

A: [1:49:18] Oh, the weekends, yeah.

Q: [1:49:20] And, I mean, that wasn't a happy moment in your – I mean, there were other things going on in your life, but that wasn't a happy moment, and –

A: [1:49:26] No, no, it wasn't, no. I mean, yeah, I ended up on the weekends doing – taking over from Ed Stewpot Stewart and doing children's. Now, I'm a music lover, and Puff the Magic Dragon is not my choice of music, and Nelly the Elephant and things like that. And a lot of people have come up to me, actually, and said that, you know, how much they enjoyed the programme. Which is lovely, but I didn't enjoy doing it, I hated it. And that's the only time I've been on the air and I didn't like it. And I did it, eventually, with Keith Chegwin and Maggie Philbin, and that was awkward for me because they were much more famous than me for the children because they were doing a TV show, and I wasn't. And I was sort of like a – I was out of – it was like a – I wasn't fitting in there, and they were. It was my show and they were guests and they were with me, alright. And I love – I liked them immensely, you know, don't get me wrong, they were great. But they were the children's entertainers, and not me. I was like a grumpy old uncle on it [laughs]. And I didn't like – I didn't like – enjoy doing the programme. But then I was doing Radio London down the road, in Marylebone High Street, and I was basically doing a programme I really wanted to do. Not Initially.

Q: [1:50:39] Did this overlap with Radio 1?

A: [1:50:41] Yes, I was doing – well, I went to Radio London –

Q: [1:50:43] I want to talk a bit about Radio London, a bit more in a moment.

A: [1:50:48] Yeah, it goes alongside a little bit, the –

Q: [1:50:52] The Radio 1 story.

A: [1:50:52] Radio 1, when I was doing the breakfast show, yeah. Because what I was doing, I was doing – I was doing the kids' show. And then I joined Radio London, and I was doing a dreadful show in the afternoon. A typical local radio show, where we were giving away this, that and the other and things. And then Derek Amore who was a – he was the Controller of Radio London, and I adored him. He was complete anti-establishment. He couldn't – he didn't really like the BBC. He used to wander round with a water pistol. And sometimes, you know, if somebody was quite high up, he'd shoot this water pistol [laughs], water at them and turn the. I mean, he was just crazy, he was crazy. But I did like him very much. And I was doing this awful programme in the afternoon. Then he wanted me to do a thing called the BBC Blackburn, Barnes, Susie Barnes, and the corporation, BBC. And I said, "It sounds awful." And he took – and I was doing the kids' show at the time on Radio 1. So we went out to dinner, and he took me out to dinner. He said, "I want you to do this show." And I said, "Well, I really don't want to do that, Derek." I said, "It sounds awful." And it's the first time I've ever done that, and I said, "I'm going to have to resign." So we'd had a glass of wine, then we had another glass of wine. He said, "What do you mean, resign?" and I said, "Well, I can't do a show like that, it sounds awful. I don't want to work with Susie Barnes, although she's a nice lady, but it won't work." And so he said, "So you resign?" So I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, don't resign." So I said, "Well, okay, I won't resign. I didn't mean to be rude or anything." He said, "You haven't resigned?" So I said, "No." He said, "Well, I'll sack you, then." So [laughs] I said, "Well, you can't do that." He said – I promise you, this is the way it happened, he said, "You can't do that because you resign." But I said, "Yeah, but I'd resigned, and then you said I hadn't resigned and then you sacked me and I can't..." So I said, "Take

it back, because..." I said, "...you can't sack me." So he said, "Alright, I'll take it back, alright, I won't sack you." So I said, "You haven't sacked me?" He said, "No." "So I'm not sacked." He said, "No." "Alright, I'm going to resign." So it went on and on like this throughout the evening, and we got more drunk as it were. And he said, at the end of the evening he said, "Have I sacked you or have you resigned?" And I said, "I don't actually know." And he said, "For God's sake, Tony, what do you want to do?" So I said, "Well, I love soul music, Derek, and I've heard the pirate radio stations, the land-based ones." And I said, "There's nobody doing that music and I love that music." And I said, "I'd like to do that and I've heard how it's done in America. I can't do that, but I'd like to be quite adventurous and quite rude on the air and, jokingly, have people on the air and be sort of just over the top." And he said, "God, that sounds like a terrific idea." And he said, "We'll do it then." So I said, "What, I can do it?" So he said, "Yes." He said, "We'll start on Monday at nine in the morning." I said, "Well, I didn't anticipate it in the morning, because I see this as sort of an X rated show, more late at night." He said, "No, no, I want it at nine in the morning and really upset the BBC." So [laughs] so we did it.

Q: [1:54:14] Why did you – I mean, two questions, really, why soul? And, in a way you've sort of answered that, passion for the music. But, actually, why rude as well, why X rated?

A: [1:54:23] Well, not rude, but I wanted to be – I wanted it to be different, different. So I wanted to set myself up like a sex god, you know, and here I am, you know, and I'm the leader of this sort of revolution, this sort of revolution, and ring me up. And so I used to [laughs] it's something you probably couldn't do now, you know, so somebody – I do it a little bit on Radio London still now, on Sundays, but somebody

would ring me up, and say, "Ooh, hello, how are you, what's your name?" "Margaret." Or something like that. I'd say, "Hello, Margaret, you sound lovely. Describe yourself to me." I say, "I visualise you as a very shapely blonde." And, you know, there'd be a giggle at the other end. And so, "Well, I'm sort of twenty eight years old." Or something like that. I said, "Have you got a boyfriend? You sound like the sort of person I'd like to go out with, and we'd go out and have a nice drink together and I'd end up at your place and I'd nibble your earlobes and gradually work my way down to your neck." [Laughs]. And it went as far as going, "And your inner thigh." and they start giggling. But I'd also do it, so it wasn't a sexist programme, I'd do it with men as well, you know. So, "Bill." "Hello. Ooh, Bill, gosh, you've got a wonderful voice, what a lovely deep voice. You sound very butch. The sort of man I'd be quite happy to be in a pub with. You'd be having a pint of beer and I'd have a sweet sherry." And so I'd go for reverse, and it would be all like that. And we'd just have fun with it, it was enormous fun. And nobody – we didn't use any delay system or anything, nobody ever swore on the programme, it was just enormous fun. And it got the most fantastic audience. And I wanted to do it like this, because I wanted to bring soul music to a much wider audience. I didn't want it to be a ghetto sort of thing. I wanted to bring it to the cab drivers, the black cab drivers, black music for the black cab drivers. And broaden it out, which it did. Now, the serious soul DJs, you know, they said, "Oh God, it's awful, you know, what's he doing?" And they were all going to Caister on their long weekends and taking the music seriously. I never wanted to take the music seriously. I wanted to make – bring it to a wider audience, which I did. And by doing that it did broaden it out. And I just had so much fun. It's the best programme, to this day, I've ever done on radio. I loved it, absolutely adored it. I was heartbroken when it came off.

Q: [1:56:50] You mentioned Derek Amore but there was also Cheryl Garnsey.

A: [1:56:54] Oh, Cheryl Garnsey was wonderful, yeah.

Q: [1:56:56] [Inaudible 01:56:56] tell us a little bit about her and her role in that programme.

A: [1:56:58] Oh, Cheryl Garnsey was fantastic. I mean, Cheryl was producing the Robbie Vincent chat show. And I was doing the kids' show on Radio 1. And my marriage had broken up. And I went in for the first day with Cheryl Garnsey, she was taken off the Robbie Vincent show and was on my show. And it was – so I met her for the first time. And it was very obvious that she didn't want to do my programme [laughs]. And she said to me – I said, "You really don't want to do this programme, do you?" She said, "Not really." Said, "You know, you liked doing the Robbie Vincent show?" She said, "Yeah. I'm not really, I didn't really visualise doing your show." So she said, "But I'm going to bring you back. We'll do a good show together and I'll bring you back." I said, "What do you mean, bring me back from where?" So she said, "Well, you must realise that you're not as big as you used to be." And I said –she said, "You're doing a children's show on Radio 1, your marriage has collapsed and you're a bit of a mess." So I said [laughs], I said, "Oh, I hadn't seen it exactly like that." I said, "Oh, thanks a lot." And I said, "Well..." I said, "...I didn't really want to be with you, either, particularly." She said, "Well, we're just going to have to make the most of it, aren't we?" And she said – and that was it. And she turned out to be the best producer I've ever had.

Q: [1:58:28] What was it that made her the best producer, what –

A: [1:58:31] She was just terrific. She – I – well, to start off with I came up with this idea of the Radio London Soul Night Out. And I said to her, I said, "We need – want to get this station out and about more." She said, "I quite agree with you." And I said, you know – and eventually I said, "We've got this soul show." And she liked soul music a little bit as well. And we shaped this programme to do something different. And after the initial shock of what she'd said, she said to me, "I said it because I was a bit embarrassed." And I said, "But you had..." She said, "I wanted the programme to be really good and I wanted to – it was a shock thing I had." Because I said, "I didn't quite know how to take you. Because you are quite a big name." But she said, "But you're not as big as you used to be." And I said, "Well, it's fair enough." And so she said, "Well, you know, we can make a good show together. Because I do think you're a good broadcaster, and what you've got in mind is quite revolutionary and different."

Q: [1:59:30] And I wonder if you can just –

A: [1:59:32] And she was great, I mean, she was just a great – and we did the Soul Night together, and she was just – I couldn't have done it without her, she was great.

Q: [1:59:38] And what exactly was it, what was that sort of magic ingredient that she brought? Because I'm thinking back to what you were saying a while ago about how in music radio, you know, what the role of the producer is, in many ways [both talking at once] could be.

A: [1:59:51] Well, that show was –

Q: [1:59:52] So what was it that made her invaluable [inaudible 01:59:55]

A: [1:59:56] She, well, the programme I was doing, I needed – the callers I needed were callers that could take a joke and were fun and slightly weird and whacky. Radio London is a lovely station, I've always loved it and I still love working there because it's slightly weird, it's slightly whacky. And the people there I absolutely adore. But in those days, in the Marylebone High Street, they were individuals and they were odd. I remember going into the news room, and one of the news people saying, "Why the hell are you here? So we're quite happy not trying that hard." I said, "Here you are trying to get a bloody audience." [Laughs] And he said, "It's going to make it..." He said, "We're all going to have to blasted well work now." And that was the attitude. And I did, I wanted it to work. So I thought up this idea of the Soul Night Out. And there was a guy called Vin Bootle there, and he didn't – they didn't believe in it. And I said – and I found this place, the National Club, Kilburn, and I wanted to take it out to, and make it into a show with black soul music. And they didn't believe in it. And I said, "Well, it would really work." And they were worried about losing money, and they said, "How much do you think it would cost?" I said, "About £500." Which in those days was quite a lot. And I wrote a cheque out, and I said, "If you don't..." I said, "This is the money for it, please let me try it." And –

Q: [2:01:16] So you paid for the first one?

A: [2:01:17] Well, yes, I wrote the cheque out, and Vin Bootle said, "Well, I can't take that, because we're the BBC." He said, "You really believe it'll work?" I said, "I really do." And so he tore the cheque up, and said, "Okay, let's do it." And the place held two and a half thousand people, and on the night five thousand turned up. And I was on the stage and Stevie Wonder turned up out of the blue on the first night. I didn't know he was coming. And Dave Pearce, who was getting the people on and off, he was, you know, in charge of making sure everybody got on the stage and things, and he said Stevie – he came on and I was in the middle of – we broadcast about an hour of it live, with Steve Walsh and things, who was marvellous. And he came on and he said, "Stevie Wonder's here and he wants to come on the stage." And I said, "What, not the Stevie Wonder?" He said, "Yeah." And I said, "Crikey, get him on." And he came on, and he just came on to say thanks for playing all Motown stuff, you know, on behalf of Motown. And that's when the show took off, right from the word go, you know. And we did it for about six or seven years. And it nearly got closed down because we were making too much money out of it. And we ploughed it all back into very odd merchandise. We had Radio London knickers [laughs], we had men's posing pouches and we had the Tony Blackburn twelve inch sticker. Because I always said I'm going to whip out my twelve inch, which was a twelve inch record. And we had twelve inch car stickers made up. And we sold [laughs] enormous numbers of – and we had women's stockings and suspenders with Radio London written all over. And Marylebone High Street, we had them all displayed in there, it was looking like an Ann Summers sex shop [laughs]. So I managed to drag a bit of the BBC down to my level, which I'm very proud of. And it was the happiest time of my life. I, Cheryl Garnsey and I, we had the most wonderful relationship, and I had enormous respect for her, and she did for me, I think, as well.

- Q: [2:03:16] And you think it was a happier time than being on the breakfast show on Radio 1?
- A: [2:03:19] Yeah. Well, I was happy doing that. And the fact it was only going to London, it didn't bother me in the slightest. Because I was off national radio for thirty years, people don't realise that, until I came back on Radio 2. But it was the happiest time in my life, we had so much fun, loved it.
- Q: [2:03:36] You also said about the Radio London Soul Night Out, this is a quote from your autobiography, it did more for bringing Londoners together than anything that ever appeared on a statute book during that period. I just wondered why, what you...
- A: [2:03:51] I think it did, I think it brought, I mean, it was a mixture of – the audience was a mixture of black and white people. And it showed everybody could get on well together, we were all there just for – to have fun. And also, it popularised soul music. I mean, as I say, some of the serious soul jocks, you know, they call themselves serious soul jocks, I don't think, really, they know any more about it than I do. But they go to – you know, they have these weekends and they talk about it very seriously. And I – and Robbie Vincent was one of those, and he tried to make out that somebody else selected the music for me. And somebody – he made out that he, to somebody, that he selected all the music for me, which, of course, he didn't. And he was a bit funny with me about that, I think.
- Q: [2:04:38] But you think that – I mean, the real essence of the programme, and you've touched on this before, is this idea of bringing

soul music to an audience that's bigger than just the soul music, you know, aficionados. So it's about bringing a music to a broader audience?

A: [2:04:51] Yeah, I'm only interested, throughout my career and still, to this day, I'm only interested in appealing to a mass audience. I'm not interested in niche audiences, so much. You know, fine, if people want to do that, that's great. I'm more interested in a mixture of coming on the air, not being serious, sending myself up, I don't take myself seriously. And I want to, you know, entertain, if you like. So I know a few people that take themselves too seriously and all this. I've never been like that. You know, I'll go on a stage, and I think probably the mistake I made in the early days of Radio 1, I'd go on the stage when I was twenty four years old, and my opening line always was, "I'll stand here and let you admire me for a moment." [Laughs], "To get over the excitement of seeing me." Now, I used to get lots of boos for that because – and then somebody explained to me that the girls had come along with their boyfriends, and the girls were quite attracted to me at the time, I gather. And the boyfriends became jealous and booed me [laughs]. Now, I didn't realise that I didn't look too bad in those days. I mean, I wasn't the knackered wreck that I look now. But, so therefore I was – it works better now. You know, I go on stage and, I mean, I went on Hyde Park in front of forty-six thousand people, and, "Here you are, the biggest moment in your life. Here I am." [Laughs]. And they all cheer now because they understand that I'm joking. But they didn't understand in those days, sometimes. Some of them got it, obviously, but I was always joking, you know, it wasn't meant to be funny. I didn't have that confidence in myself, I wasn't that conceited. You know, I was just enjoying being on the air. And the stardom bit never went to – it never went to my head. You know, I was very aware

that it could all come to an end tomorrow, you know, very aware of that.

Q: [2:06:38] I want to come to that, and I want to come to Matthew Bannister in a second.

A: [2:06:43] Yes.

Q: [2:06:43] But just, in terms of the kind of the sheer fun you were having with the sex and soul, as a contrast to the kind of the sort of sense of sort of moving down the schedules at Radio 1. And you said that you weren't, you know, that was an unhappy period of your life. And you spoke very, very honestly, you wrote very honestly about your addiction to prescription drugs at the time as well.

A: [2:07:06] Yes, yeah, Valium, yeah.

Q: [2:07:07] Now, I don't want you, necessarily, to kind of, you know, go back and talk about it –

A: [2:07:10] No, I don't mind talking about that.

Q: [2:07:12] But I just wondered, well, I just wondered if you could just sort of paint a picture of how that impacted or how you tried to manage its impact on your broadcasting career. Because, I mean, you can't – one would imagine that would be, you know, quite fatal to...

A: [2:07:31] Well, I didn't – when my marriage broke up I was still, you know, I wanted to get back with my ex-wife. And I didn't realise how boring I was being, talking about it on air. And I was also taking Valium as well, which my dad prescribed for me, and we didn't realise at the time it was addictive. But I was talking far too much about it. And I do think that somebody at the BBC should have told me that I was being boring about it. But it just went on, and perhaps people were fascinated by it. And I was playing records to my wife, you know, Throwing It All Away. And Phil Swern brought out a record by R&J Stone called Throwing It All Away. And, of course, that became my theme music. And that went on and on. And it was stupid. And I should have realised. But nobody – somebody should have told me. You know, it just – my private life wasn't that happy and I was taking these prescription drugs and I was a bit of a mess, really. And I was probably drinking a little bit too much. Yet it didn't affect – it didn't affect me too much on air, except that I was going on and on and on about it. And it should have stopped, and that was the mistake I made. But, in a strange sort of way, some of the public enjoyed it, you know, particularly the men that were going through divorces, I became like their spokesman a little bit. And I didn't want to be. I don't want to – I mean, I'm a vegetarian, but I don't preach it. So I didn't want to be a spokesman for anybody who was getting divorced. And I was getting divorced and, you know, I didn't particularly enjoy it.

Q: [2:08:58] And what you were going through, I mean, I know you were alluding to it on air, in terms of the Valium, for instance, was that something that you kept very private? Or were there people at the BBC who knew?

A: [2:09:11] They didn't know I was taking Valium, no. I mean, I remember wandering out of a programme and across the road and, frankly, getting knocked over. Because I was in a world of my own, you know, it was very enjoyable. And I have got an addictive personality, you know, so I could get hooked on something quite easily, I have to be careful of that. Because my dad was a doctor and, you know – but we didn't even realise that I was, you know, addicted to it. But I came off it. As soon as I realised I was addicted I came off it in three weeks. And I've always hated people that go on about things on air. Because my sisters disabled and in a wheelchair and she's – and people have far less things to worry about than me. I mean, all the troubles in the world, how dare anybody being paid very well to do a job they like go on and on about it and bore people about it. And I, you know, I was wrong and I'll never make that mistake again, you know.

Q: [2:10:06] So in a sense, what you – I mean, is that your sense of how it sort of ended with Radio 1 at that stage, was that you felt – I mean, do you think you were sort of falling out of love, at some level, with Radio 1, anyway, that you were sort of moving on? Or would you have wanted to stay?

A: [2:10:25] No, I think the problem was that, two problems, really, the natural progression from Radio 1 to Radio 2 now is very good because there is that link-up with Radio 1 and Radio 2. And I think that's the case, you know, you build an audience on Radio 1 at the time, and that audience gets a little bit older with you. And the music you're probably playing isn't quite what you like and so you move over to Radio 2. In those days that wasn't possible because it would have been a risk. Because Doreen Davies was married to Derek Mills. Derek Mills was an executive producer and high up in Radio 2, Doreen was

an executive producer at Radio 1. So if I'd gone to Derek Mills – and I knew them both very well, you know, we went out to dinner and stuff like that, if I'd said to Derek Mills, "I think I'm getting a little bit, knocking on a bit for Radio 1. Would there be a job here on Radio 2?" Now, if there wasn't a job there, he would probably say to Doreen, "Tony doesn't – not very happy at being with Radio 1, he wants to be with us." And I might not have got a job there, so I would have been out of a job. So I'd love to have gone to Radio 2, and said, "I would really love to come over here now. Because I'm getting older now and I could bring my audience over from Radio 1 to you." But there wasn't that natural progression. There is now. And also, Johnny Beerling, I think he probably found out that I got him removed from the studio with his stopwatch. And he became Controller of Radio 1. And I was on the other side, he was on the Aeolian Hall side, which was the live music. And I wasn't a particular friend of Johnny's. I am now, I love the man, you know, we get on like a house on fire now. But I think he probably – they wanted to get rid of me, and Derek Chinnery didn't want to because he was, you know, he'd been with me from the word go. There was a changeover period, and if somebody was going to get rid of me, Johnny Beerling was quite happy to do it. And so he took the brunt of it, really. And so – and, you know, I have said to Johnny Beerling in the past, "It's funny we're very good friends now and, you know, you say all these lovely things about me, but I can't help but remind you that you sacked me." [Laughs]. But fair enough, it was the time to go, you know. And I think they – you know, I think one or two people at Radio 1, even now are probably there and they're too old for it. And I think there's a time when you move onto something a bit more mature, if you like.

Q: [2:12:52] I mean, one of the things that sort of happened, and this is sort of jumping ahead a little bit to the sort of early 1990s, and it was the

Matthew Bannister era as well. But also, you had Paul Whitehouse and Harry Enfield, and Smashie and Nicey.

A: [2:13:03] [Laughs] Yes.

Q: [2:13:05] I mean, which, of course, everyone found incredible fun.

A: [2:13:09] And I did.

Q: [2:13:09] Yeah. But, I mean, you know, their arrival must have been a problem. Because, I mean, it was pretty obvious who they were kind of satirising.

A: [2:13:19] Of course, of course. Paul Whitehouse is me, yeah.

Q: [2:13:21] Yeah. And it did make you look, effectively, like dinosaurs. So, I mean, I mean, obviously there's a pleasure to being satirised. But there must at some level have been a kind of anxiety about what – whether or not this was going to have an impact on your career.

A: [2:13:39] No, I didn't see it [laughs]. I'm just a thick disc jockey, I didn't see it coming. No, no, I mean, I thought it was hilarious, I thought it was absolutely hilarious. And when I saw it, you know, Paul Whitehouse and Harry Enfield, and it was - it was me. But I don't know, I could never understand why he had white sort of hair on, I don't know what that. He had the teeth and everything and he was, you know, "Poppadoodle do, mate." And all that sort of stuff. And, of course, the other one was obviously Alan Freeman. And I met Paul Whitehouse,

and I said to him, I said – Paul's great, you know, lovely guy, and I said to him, I said, "It is me, isn't it? You're me, aren't you?" He said, "Well, I'm a..." He said, "We are a combination of Noel and you. I'm you and Noel. And the other one is DLT, Dave Lee Travis and Alan Freeman." And he said, "A little bit more of Alan Freeman." DLT didn't see the joke in it and didn't like it. Noel, he wasn't bothered because he was making a fortune on TV. I just found the whole thing funny. But I think the people that were at Radio 1, the management there, they didn't see the humour in it. And they took themselves too seriously. It was a bit of fun. And they thought, ooh, God we can't be seen to be employing dinosaurs. And so it was the end of that era, if you like, and –

Q: [2:15:07] So it influenced the management, do you think?

A: [2:15:08] Oh, it influenced the management, yeah. They totally – they didn't stick by us at all, no. Oh, the management were really flaky and, you know, that was their problem. I thought it was immensely funny, and I thought it actually did us quite a lot of good, I thought it was fun. And I, actually, adopted some of their catchphrases, which I never used to do before. And I still do sometimes use it, poppadoodle do, mate, poppadoodle-tastic. And I thought it was hilarious. I've never said, in my life, poppadoodle-tastic before they did it. I used it, I think, last week on, I think on Sounds of the 60s, I said, "What a poppadoodle-tastic record." And it's fun now and everybody sees the humour in it. I thought it was hilarious. Loved it, absolutely loved it.

A: ... those people who were too old for it. But you do it gradually and you don't upset the audience, you gradually do it, that's the way you handle people. And I've never wanted to be in management, but I

think I'd be quite good at it, actually. I think [laughs] – I mean, I do find one or two people, without mentioning names, actually ask for my advice now. And I think, why should I give you advice, it's your job? You know, but I can see people making mistakes and –

Q: [2:15:50] And what do you think – I mean, you say you think you'd be good at management.

A: [2:15:52] Yeah.

Q: [2:15:53] Is that essentially because you see management as about a relational thing, it's about dealing with people?

A: [2:15:57] I think I know more about popular, pop radio, and I know my audience better than management people. Because I mix with the audience more and I know – and I also use social media a lot. I'm very – although I'm older, seventy four years old, I've embraced – I was one of the first to embrace technology. I embraced – I was one of the first people to have a satellite dish in this country and sat nav. I had it when it was only mapped out and the inner part of London. So when I got to Camberley, it went off the map. And I embraced Twitter very quickly and Facebook, and I saw the way it could be used for promotion. Whereas the management – I think some people I know here don't know it enough, and they don't realise the power of it. And I think that's ridiculous, quite ridiculous. And so therefore if I was controlling things now, it would be much better.

Q: [2:16:56] So you joined Capital Gold and, later, Classic Gold.

A: [2:17:04] Yes.

Q: [2:17:05] And I just wondered whether or not that, you know, it felt in any sense odd at that stage to, after many, many years not being at the BBC, or whether the fact that it was essentially pop radio and you were kind of doing what you wanted to do, and so on. But that actually, that was what counted and it didn't actually make any difference to you?

A: [2:17:24] It – no, I mean, I'd always loved working for the BBC. But, okay, I wasn't at the BBC any more, and I moved on. And I'm glad I went into commercial radio, because that's where I came from. And I enjoyed commercial radio for a time and it was very enjoyable. Then I didn't enjoy it so much when it became – once again, you know, it was more controlled. And it went, for me, the day that – Richard Park came in one morning and altered the whole format. And he'd heard a station in America, the three in a row and a time check brigade. And, you know, you play three in a row and then you can't speak for three records. And to me, that did away with the personality. Which is basically what he was doing, because if you – it makes it cheap radio because if you don't have to hire personalities who are expensive, you can create a station that doesn't have to rely so much on personality. Which is quite a clever way of thinking. But, to me, it took all the fun out of it and I wasn't happy doing that. And he changed it overnight, and Kenny Everett – I remember Dave Cash said to me, "You can't talk until you've played three records." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "No, it's a new format." And it was awful. And the audience were ringing up, saying, "What's wrong?" And it was appalling. And Kenny Everett, you had Kenny Everett on there, and Kenny had to do it,

and it was ridiculous. And so Richard Park got me into his office, and said to me, "What do you think? What do you think of this?" Or [in Australian accent], "What do you think of this?" And I said, "Well, it doesn't really work, does it. It doesn't work because it's very slow, it sounds slow." And I said, "The way you do radio is jingles, you know, a jingle here and you make yourself sound fast and exciting." I said, "This isn't, it's boring and it's predictive, you know, you know after three records somebody's going to say something for twenty seconds and then go on. And then it's another three records and go on." I said, "Radio is going into people's homes and talking to them and appearing entertaining but keeping the music flowing." And he said, "Who's your agent?" I said, "You know who my agent is, Joe [inaudible 02:19:45]." He said, he said, "Well, you can eff off, can't you." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You can eff off." So I said, "Well, what did you ask me, Richard?" He said, "I asked you what you thought of the station." I said, "Well, ask me again." He said, "Why, I asked you what you thought?" I said, "It's wonderful, it's absolutely fabulous." And he said, "You don't mean it, do you?" I said, "No, no, you eff off." And I walked out. And then he rung me up that night, and said, "Ooh, I'm looking forward to your breakfast show tomorrow morning." He never apologised but that was his way of saying –

Q: [2:20:24] An apology?

A: [2:20:25] Yeah. But, I think, from that moment on commercial radio changed, I think, for the worse. But people might disagree with me. But it never, to me, had that feel to it any more. You know, it was always – not the – it was just the fact that we weren't allowed to be ourselves so much. I never suffered from that on commercial radio because I just went in and did it. And even now, I work for KMFM in

Kent, and they allow me to do exactly what I want. I choose the music, and they're lovely. But they know that there's no point in trying to get me to do that, because I can't do it, there's no point. And, if you're, you know, if you're hiring me, you're hiring what I've done for years. And I'm not saying for one moment that I can't be, you know, I won't take direction from people. And, if somebody says, "You're doing too much of that or too much of that." I'll say, "Yeah, you're probably right, actually." And I listen to my own shows back, and if I'm doing something that I think is wrong, then I'll put it right. Or if my wife says to me, "It's stupid, that, you know, that wasn't very good." I'll listen to that, I'll listen to people. So I'm not arrogant enough to say I know it all. Because none of us know it all.

Q: [2:21:28] I want to sort of come now to sort of your rejoining and coming back to radio, coming to Radio 2. But I just wondered, I mean, back in 1967 there was a sort of sense in which your experience with the pirates allowed you to bring something fresh to the BBC.

A: [2:21:52] Yes.

Q: [2:21:53] And I wonder whether or not you feel that your years in commercial radio allow you to bring something to the BBC, that the BBC wouldn't have unless it had that. In other words, you know, despite all your doubts about the way in which commercial radio is being sort of formatted and respected and so on, do you believe that having worked in commercial radio brings something to you and your show?

A: [2:22:18] Yes, a selling aspect, more. I think um, particularly on the pirate ships, I learnt the fact that if – Big L, Radio London, you always

promote the station very heavily. Because, if a station is – what people – a lot of broadcasters don't realise is that, okay, you promote yourself alongside the station. But we were always taught, and it's an American system, whereby the station is always bigger than you are. If the station is successful, you're successful. If the station isn't successful, you're not successful. So you always promote the station, in other words. I mean, this morning, I said Radio, you know, Radio 2, Europe's number one and the biggest thing in Europe. Which it is, and you've got to promote it the whole time. And I don't hear people doing that enough, promoting the station, they're always promoting themselves. Which is fine, and you do promote yourself, and I'm a real self-promoter. But you promote the radio station you're working for more than anything else. It's the biggest thing since sliced bread. Radio London, when I go on it, Radio London, I have a catchphrase, in a class by itself. And, you know, you do the catchphrase, you push that catchphrase the whole time. And people – the modern day DJ doesn't understand that because they've never been told how to do it. And so I bring that to it. And also, Steve Wright and myself are very similar in our attitude towards radio. I'm a great admirer of Steve Wright. Radio, particularly Radio 2, is full of TV people who are radio people. We're, Steve says it, Serious Jockin', we're disc jockeys. We know how to disc jockey a programme, in other words, talking up to the intro of a record. You'll never get a TV person doing that, they don't know how to do it. But that – and I get criticised for talking over the introduction of the record, but it makes it sounds slick. It's slick [clicks fingers], it's slick [clicks fingers], it's slick. And that's what we do. We're a dying – Steve said to me the other day, we're a dying breed because we are disc jockeys. These people are celebrities and they're not disc jockeys. And that's the difference. So I think, when I come on the air or, and Steve comes on the air, there is this wham [clicks fingers], wham [clicks fingers], wham, you know, disc jockey feel to it. Not so much on Sounds of the

60s because I bring it back a bit. But certainly with the Golden Hour that I do, that's real – that's where I – that's my style, really. The very slick approach to it. And, if they give me the proper jingles, which they don't give me at the moment, I can do it even better. You know, with those lovely [inaudible 02:24:43] jingles, which I introduced on Pick of the Pops, and I don't play any more, which I can't play them. Which upsets me a bit. But I want, with Sounds of the 60s, proper jingles. I will get it eventually, but at the moment they're fighting back. But they don't understand. My only frustration is I'm working with people who are too young to have understood the history of radio and the way it really can sound. And that it can sound – I can sound better if I'm given the materials for it. And at the moment, I'm half, three quarters of the way there with Sounds of the 60s. I only need those package of jingles and that will be fantastic.

Q: [2:25:23] Can I just, perhaps, go back just a tiny bit and get you to just sort of take us through the process of rejoining the BBC, rejoining Radio 2. Sort of when that was and how it happened.

A: [2:25:36] Well, I went out with – I went out to – I've always wanted to be on Radio 2, and I never thought I'd get there. Because, you know, I was very happy doing what I was doing. But I like Radio 2 and I wanted to be a part of it. And, sorry, [coughs and drinks water] it's not emotion, I just had a [laughs]...

Q: [2:25:56] I'll have a drink myself.

A: [2:26:02] I'd like to – you know, I mean, I'd just done I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here! And all the rest of it. And I wanted to be a part of –

you know, I'm getting older, and I thought – I've been at Radio 1, I'd love to have gone out on national radio and been a part of it, because – and being a part of the big names there. And so I asked my agent to, you know, I said, "Can I meet anybody there?" I'd already been out to dinner with Lawrence, Lewis, Lewis Carnie, who is now the Head of Radio 2. He was one of the senior people there. And he wanted me to do a programme with Cilla Black, just a one-off. So I went out to dinner with him, and he said to me, he said, "I'd like you to do a programme with Cilla Black." So I said, "Yeah, fine lovely, I love Radio 2." And I said – and he said, "Well..." I said, "I like Radio 2 because you're allowed to be a personality." And he said to me something I hadn't heard anybody else say for a long time, he said, "I don't mind how long the DJ talks for as long as it's interesting." And I said – and that was music to my ears. I thought, that is somebody who knows what they're talking about. So that was great. And then I – Bob Shennan, who was the Head of Radio 2 at the time, I said to Nick, my agent, I said, "I'd love to – do you think I could take Bob Shennan out to lunch and have a chat with him?" And he said, "I'll see if Bob would like to come." So he said, "Yeah, I'd love to meet Tony Blackburn." So I booked up to go to The Ivy restaurant. And he was there before me, which I'm always early for everything, but he was there before me. And so I said, "Hello, Bob." I hadn't met him before. And so we shook hands. And he said, "Before we sit down I want to just offer you something." And I thought, ooh. He said, "I'd like you to do Pick of the Pops." And I said, "What, you're offering me Pick of the Pops?" And he said, "Yes, I'd like you to do that." Because I was on Smooth Radio. He said, "The only thing is, that you – I don't want you on Smooth Radio and Radio 2." So he said, "If you did Pick of the Pops, I want you to resign from Radio 2." And I said, "Can I think about it for four seconds?" [Laughs]. And that was it, that's how it happened, you know. And we sat down, and he said, "I must pay for this lunch because it's now a BBC

lunch." So, and that was it, so that's the way it happened. And, you know, I resigned from Smooth Radio, you know, very amicably, but, you know, I wanted to get back to the BBC. And that was it, you know. And it was terrific. And I altered Pick of the Pops quite considerably, you know, bringing jingles in. And was very happy doing it until, you know, other stuff that I can't talk about happened. And that – but I loved doing that programme, Pick of the Pops, absolutely adored it, yeah. Because that was proper disc jockeying again, you know, it's lovely and I adored it.

Q: [2:29:14] You – I want to – you mentioned, very briefly, I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here! –

A: [2:29:19] Yes, yeah.

Q: [2:29:19] I want to ask you a little bit about that. So that was 2002?

A: [2:29:24] 2002, yes.

Q: [2:29:24] So first of all, I mean, given the fact that you're a radio man –

A: [2:29:31] Yes, yeah.

Q: [2:29:32] What was the appeal of taking part in I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!?

A: [2:29:36] Well, I was sixty years old then, and my agent at the time, I think it was Nick, he said to me – I got this phone call, that said, "How would you like to go out into the middle of the Australian jungle and survive for two weeks with a load of other TV people." And I thought he was joking. So I said, "Oh, that sounds like great fun." And that was it. And then about three weeks later he said to me, "Could you get to ITV on the South Bank at about eleven o'clock on Monday." And I said, "What for?" He said, "Well, the programme I was telling you about, where they drop you in the middle of the jungle and you have to survive for two weeks." And I said, "Oh, what, you were being serious?" He said, "Yeah." So I said, "Oh, okay." Well, I went along there and I met this researcher or somebody, and she said, "You know, we're doing this programme." She said, "How would you survive in the jungle?" I said, "Well, I hadn't really thought about it." He said – I said, "Well, I'm a vegetarian." Which I am, I've always been. So I said, "I couldn't kill anything and I wouldn't eat meat." So he said, "How will you survive?" I said, "Well, I've got no idea, really." And so I said, "Presumably you give us something to eat, do you?" So he said, "Oh no, no, no." He said, "You have to win this thing. And we don't take you out for a dinner afterwards or something like that." He said, "You're in there and you have to survive." He said, "We do sort of, you know, we won't see you starve or anything. But you have to survive in the jungle." So I said, "Well, I hadn't really thought about it. Is there any grass in there?" He said, "I don't know." "So I suppose you'd eat grass or something, there must be some vegetation there you can eat, fruit and things like that." He said, "You don't particularly seem too prepared for the jungle." I said, "Well, why did you want to see me?" So I said, "I'm sixty years old, I'm a vegetarian, I won't kill anything." And then I said, "I can only say that, I don't know, really." I said, "Why did you want to see me?" He said, "Well, we're just interviewing a lot of people." So I said, "Fine." And that was it. And then about a couple of weeks later [laughs] I got the

job. And my wife said, "Oh God, you can't do that. You'll be awful at that because you're not very good with people." And so [laughs] because I'm not one of these people that goes out to parties and things like that. I don't really – I like sitting at home and watching TV, really. And my mother, at the time she said to me, "Ooh, I wouldn't do that. You're going to have cameras on you the whole time, you'll be awful." [Laughs] And she said, "You know, people irritate you." So...

Q: [2:32:17] So why do you think you won in the end?

A: [2:32:20] Well, I don't know, I mean, I went – I mean, I took the programme because, first of all, I thought the idea was great, I thought it was really interesting. And I said to my wife, I said, "I've got to do this because these opportunities come up once in a life. And I'd hate to watch that programme and say, "I could have been a part of that."" And so I'd also never been to Australia, and I wanted to go to Australia. So I don't know, I went there, and the most horrendous people. They were all – they were lovely people individually, but none of them got on well. And, even before we went into the jungle they were all arguing. And I was the oldest there and I didn't – I loved Ant and Dec, and we had a meal before, Ant and Dec and I, we were having a few drinks together. And, you know, they said, "Well, good luck, good luck for the programme." And I said, "Thanks." You know, it was the first one. And so they said, "I think it's going to be really great, for us." [Laughs]. And they were lovely. And everybody – the cameramen had all bet that I'd win it before I went in. And Ant and Dec thought I'd win it. And I don't know, I went in there and just was myself. And I fell in love with the – I fell in love with the jungle. And the people Individually I quite liked, you know, they are alright and they all seemed to come with – I became like the Henry Kissinger of the jungle, sorting out people's

problems. Which is terribly unlike me, you know, because normally if somebody comes up and says they've got these prob..., "Oh, I can't help you." [Laughs]. And it got to the state when it was like a children's playground. And I remember standing up, and saying, "Look, stop it, just stop it." And I forgot the cameras were there, I said, "You're all behaving like juveniles. Just stop it." I said, "If you don't stop being like children, I'm going to go." Then I suddenly thought, I can't, really [laughs] we're in the middle of a jungle. But it just – it was the most wonderful experience of my life. And I got on well with everybody. And I don't know.

Q: [2:34:18] What did winning sort of mean to you at the end? I mean, having won it –

A: [2:34:25] Oh, I thought it was –

Q: [2:34:25] Did it make a difference to your career, to your life, to your attitude?

A: [2:34:26] No, I didn't want it to make – somebody said to me before I went in there, they said, you know, "This would..." Somebody said, "He's gone in there to rescue a career." Until I went in I thought I was doing quite well [laughs]. But, no, I didn't want it to alter my career at all. I just – when I came out I was immensely, you know, flattered at the fact that the public had voted for me. And, because I – actually, to be honest with you, I mean, I saw right from the word go they were doing this in – I thought how are they doing this show? Because we didn't know where Ant and Dec came from, they appeared every morning. And I thought they must be, you know, they're not, obviously,

broadcasting twenty four hours of it. They must be doing it in segments. So I used to get up – I don't sleep very well, I never have done, so they – I was in charge of the fire and these logs and things. And I kept the fire going because I awake most of the night. And I – every time I got up in the morning, I used to get up and tell a couple of gags. And I thought, if they want that, they can use it. And then I just – was just myself for the rest of the day. And I started collecting a lot of logs and I got quite – because it gave you something to do during the day. And I got slightly obsessed by them and I collected so many logs, they told me afterwards that I collected enough logs to keep it going for over a month. And they had to take some of the logs down because it was concealing the cameras, because you couldn't see where the cameras were. And they chucked – the only thing that was – what they did with the programme was, they would always throw in logs by the side of this lovely river that we were by. And we heard them going in every day and they'd – and every time they threw the logs in, we'd all go, "Hallelujah." [Laughs] So there were more logs. And one day we went out, towards the end of the programme, out of the camp, and these logs that I'd collected, and it had taken me hours to collect them, they took the whole lot out. And I felt so depressed. And I went back to collect some more, I thought, we need some more of these logs, and I actually recognised some of them. And they actually got me talking to one of the logs [laughs] [inaudible 02:36:28] and I remember saying, "Hello. God, I recognise you, you're a very lovely log, and I'm going to take you back." And [laughs] and I hadn't gone round the twist, but I just sort of – it just kept my mind focused on this thing. I loved it there.

Q: [2:36:44] I mean, the fact that you loved it, did you get a sort of feeling at the end of it that – did you have any sort of regrets about thinking, wait a minute, maybe I should have had a life in television?

A: [2:36:51] No, no. I just enjoyed the experience. And it changed me as a person very much. The no mobile phones, and Nell McAndrew, her and I got on terribly well, and a lovely girl. And we just used to sit by the side of this lovely stream chatting and things like that. And, when she put the hat on, you know, those hats you wear on things, she always looked like my – somebody I fell in love with ages ago, Doris Day. And before we all went to bed at night, she'd always put that hat on and wink at me [laughs]. And, you know, the people I was in there with, individually they were great. And it was so peaceful. And I found this inner – I'm not religious, I can't stand religion, I hate religion, but it was like an inner sort of calmness that I had. And I thought, I wonder how long this is going to last for, this calmness.

Q: [2:37:41] Was that about the nature as much as anything?

A: [2:37:43] Yeah, I think it was. And I think it was just – I just felt so calm, and I thought, you know, I'm not – I'm so lucky with what I've got and, you know, I should appreciate it more in the outside. And I thought, I don't know how long this will last for. And a part of it has lasted all this time. And I'm much better with people now than I ever used to be and I appreciate things more. And I don't worry about things so much as I used to. I still worry about things and I still – people irritate me if I, you know, particularly management. And [laughs] so that hasn't gone. But I don't – you know, I'm better with people than I used to be, I think much better. I'm much calmer and a much nicer person than I was. Because I think it – you know, and I remember something that affected me very much when I came out of it. I was filling up my car, and a dear old bloke came over on a Zimmer frame, he was about – he must have been about eighty years old or something. And he put his arms

round me, and he said, "You've done so much for our age group."
[Laughs]. He was so sweet. And everybody was so, you know, the public, I don't know, they changed a little bit towards me, I think. And, you know, when I got into a few problems, the public were really, really, really lovely. And I do have that relationship with the public which is very special now. And I – and on my radio programmes, when I first started broadcasting I used to get very big audiences, but people didn't like me [laughs], they didn't like me. But the AI figures that they do at the BBC, they were always very low for me. Now, they're very high, the highest, actually, on the network. So people have actually got used to me, you know, I'm sort of an acquired taste, I suppose.

Q: [2:39:17] Finally.

A: [2:39:19] Yeah, I suppose they've come to terms with the fact, you know, oh, he's not going to go away, so we might as well just go along with it. So I've got a lovely relationship with people. People are terribly nice to me now.

Q: [2:39:29] Just in our last few minutes, I just wanted to kind of ask you to reflect a little bit about the whole of your time at the BBC.

A: [2:39:37] Yes.

Q: [2:39:39] Are you glad that you've actually spent a large part of your kind of professional life working for the BBC?

A: [2:39:43] Yes, I am, yeah. It's a great organisation. It's got a lot of, like any big organisation, it's got its faults. But you can't run a big organisation like this without having any faults. It's, within the stipulation of what it has to do, it does very well. It churns out the best programmes on television and radio. There's no better organisation, it's respected worldwide. And if you're a broadcaster, you want to be a part of it. I mean, if you're a commercial radio broadcaster, every commercial radio broadcaster wants to be a part of the BBC. And if they say they don't, they're lying. The BBC is the – it's the height of anybody's profession to be a part of it. And it's – I'm very proud of it. And it comes in for a lot of stick from the media. A lot of those newspapers, they run their own organisations, so you can see why they have a go. And the BBC can't do anything right, but, by God, it tries. And the licence fee, it's always been a thing, it's the best value for money going, actually. You know, it really is, it really is very, very good value for money. Whether or not the licence will survive, probably it won't. Because I think, probably, actually, if it did away with the licence and ran it along the lines of Sky, I think they'd probably make more money out of it. And people would subscribe to it because they'd realise what they're missing. I've always said, what they should do, and I've said it to the management [inaudible 02:41:10] I said, "Why the hell the BBC doesn't just – when they're going through these times with the politicians being awkward and trying to get rid of the BBC, as they sometimes do, close it down for a couple of weeks and see what it's like without it." And I think the people would realise what it does. You know, the iPlayer and the television and all the local radio and everything it supplies, it's a wonderful organisation. And I'm really proud to be a part of it.

Q: [2:41:38] Is the Tony Blackburn who we hear on air the same as the Tony Blackburn off air?

A: [2:41:46] You'll be delighted to know, not quite [laughs]. Um, no, I mean, it would be awful if I went home and I said to my wife, you know, "Have you heard the one about the..?" No, I'm not like that. There is – I mean, I'm quite – there's a juvenile side to me, I suppose, a little bit, and that side. No, I'm not, I'm more serious and take things more – I get very hurt by, you know, some of the news items we see now on children and things like that. And the stupidity of terrorism and the stupidity of some religion. So I'm more serious than people would give me credit for. Probably a little bit more intelligent than people might think I am. Yes, I'm not stupid. Yeah, but at the same time, I enjoy being stupid on the air.

Q: [2:42:35] So there is an element of performance and [both talking at once]?

A: [2:42:37] Oh yes, yeah. Well, I'd be – I wouldn't want to live with myself the way I am on radio [laughs]. I couldn't put up with it, no.

Q: [2:42:41] But [inaudible 02:42:41] I can't remember, I'm sorry, whether it's your daughter or your son who remembers you rehearsing in front of the microphone at home, when you were sort of planning programmes and so on. That sense of –

A: [2:42:52] I don't remember doing that, no.

Q: [2:42:55] But you don't – but there must be a sense in which – I'm not trying to – I'm not suggesting it's a sort of, entirely manufactured. But it's

not entirely spontaneous, either. It's conscious, there's an element of conscious performance, that you become a slightly different aspect of your personality when you're in front of [both talking at once]

A: [2:43:12] Yeah, I mean, a lot of that – a lot of the stuff that I'm there, that is my personality, because of the stupid sense of humour and things like that. So it's not, it's not put on. I don't – I think, probably what people saw in me in I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!, I wasn't being false. So there isn't a falseness to me. What I do on air is me. But it's a larger – it's a much larger bit of me than there really is. So in other words, I'm playing a part, in a way, a little bit. But a lot of that, regrettably, is me [laughs]. There's probably more of me than I'd like to admit in it. I've got a silly sense of humour. And I do find – I mean, like, I find, you know, the fact I would say to my wife, "A gorilla goes into a pub, and says to the landlord, "Can I have a pint of beer, please?" And the landlord says to the gorilla, "We don't get many gorillas in here." And the gorilla says, "Well, I'm not surprised at these prices."" Now, my wife doesn't find that funny. So my wife doesn't find my sense of humour that funny. She loves the music I play. But I find that funny, you know, and I do find the jokes that I tell quite funny myself [laughs]. Which, I think I'd have to find that humour funny to put it over. So I'm not completely – regrettably I do find those – the stupid things like that funny. But my style of broadcasting has changed over the years. It's not just one gag after another, it is – it is taking the Mickey out of myself telling the jokes, if you like. So there is a subtle, there's a subtle difference in it. Because I wouldn't like to be doing exactly the same programme. And I think I'm better now as a broadcaster than I was when I first started. In fact the – Helen Thomas, you know, the second in charge of Radio 2, said to me the other day, "I think you're better now than you ever have been." And I said to her, "I can't disagree with that." [Laughs].

Q: [2:45:09] So, I mean, my last question, then, perhaps follows logically on that. Do you have any plans to retire?

A: [2:45:14] No, I don't. I don't have plans to retire, because I think it's very important to, when you wake up in the morning, to have something to do. You know, and I don't play golf and I don't like sport and I'm not bothered with that. I could watch Coronation Street till kingdom come, you know. I did watch eighteen episodes in a row once. But I don't want to retire, but I don't want to go on as long as one or two people have. And, you know, just go in there and not really be as good as they have been. So, when I think I'm not doing as well, or if somebody, hopefully, tells me. And I've said to my wife, "Tell me if I don't sound any good any more. Because I want to then give it up." I don't want to give it up, but I don't want to go in there and, you know, I've heard one or two people who've gone on a bit too long. And the BBC are very kind, there is a kindness to them, where they don't quite know how to get rid of somebody who doesn't quite know where they are any more [laughs]. And so I – and there is a story about one, you know, one guy going in, and saying to the producer, "Where do I sit?" And he'd been doing the programme for about ninety odd years. And I don't want to go – I don't want to do that, you know. So, when the time comes, when I don't think I'm doing it quite as well, then I think it would be good to say goodbye.

Q: [2:46:33] Thank you very much.

A: [2:46:35] Thank you.

Q: [2:46:36] I'm going to just ask one more question.

A: [2:46:38] Yeah, of course.

Q: [2:46:38] Is there anything, just in the last few minutes, that you think we haven't touched on, that you really want to talk about?

A: [2:46:43] I don't think so, honestly, you've been terribly thorough. God, you've done the research, bloody hell [laughs].

Q: [2:46:49] Well, it's a pleasure. I mean –

A: [2:46:52] I mean, it's quite a long time for research, isn't it.

Q: [2:46:54] It's a long [both talking at once].

A: [2:46:54] The longer I go on, the more research there is [laughs].

Q: [2:46:57] Thank you very much.

A: [2:46:58] No, I've enjoyed – I mean, I've really enjoyed it all, you know, I've been terribly lucky to enjoy it. And I also, you know, do love broadcasting. And I also love, you know, listening to really good people. I like listening to really good people. You know, like John, John on the Today programme and things like that, John Humphrys, people like that, really good at their job. I respect those people. And it's a privilege to be at the BBC because you are working with those big

names and the best people. And it's lovely. And they – and I've always found those people really nice people as well, because they don't have anything to prove.

[END OF RECORDING – 02:47:40]

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