

Hey Mr DJ!

Being in the right place at the right time has worked out well for Toby Anstis, as Anastasia Grabova finds out in this exclusive chat

Toby Anstis, the chirpy radio presenter, has been a household name for as long as many of us can remember, presenting kids' TV favourites such as *The Broom Cupboard* on CBBC and music show *The O-Zone* over on BBC2. A perpetual love of music instigated a career in radio, and since 2003, the happy chappy has been keeping the nation entertained every weekday morning on Heart FM, all the while taking in part in various other TV appearances including a stint in the *I'm A Celebrity* jungle, and judging Britain's Next Top Model. On 27th October this year Toby made a visit to the Essex Air Ambulance in Earls Colne to take a look at the new visitor centre, dropping in on The Colchester Circle HQ on the way home. It was here, in the cosy arts library at 15 Queen Street, that Toby and I sat down with a cup of tea for a good old chat about his life as a Heart FM DJ, as well as a 20-year career in the media that has seen him work with some of the biggest names in national TV.

What's your involvement with the Essex Air Ambulance?

Basically we go and support local projects, giving them air time if we can, and keep the awareness up for them as well. We go down there, talk to them, do interviews, tweet, all that kind of thing. They do a really good job. They're unsung heroes really aren't they?

Talking of charity, you've been made ambassador for the Have a Heart foundation?

Yes, I'm first one actually, which I was a little bit chuffed about. I got asked two weeks ago, and feel honoured. This year the chosen charity is Childline, which I've done a fair amount with already. Love getting out and about and doing what I can. This is going to keep me busy!

What does the role of an ambassador involve?

We do events, and raise awareness. The thing with Childline is that they get something like 700,000 calls from children every year and they can't staff all those. It costs around £4 to just have a counsellor ready to take a call, and there just aren't enough people to take

those. I could even train as a counsellor, though if I have time to do that I don't know. There are lots of ways of raising awareness and raising funds, so I will be getting involved in that.

Childline is so important, because I think when you're growing up there are often times when you feel like you need somebody impartial to help.

Bizarrely, the first thing I did with them was when I first started on *The O-Zone*. In 1993 there was a concert called Childline Extravaganza at Wembley Arena with Take That as the headline band. I was hosting it, and when Take That finished, they pulled down their trousers and they had Childline written across their bums. I didn't take my trousers down by the way – I was purely hosting! I was absolutely flabbergasted at what they were doing! Outrageous [laughs]! But it was brilliant publicity for

Childline. That made a lot of papers! Not saying we've got any ideas like that this time though.

I saw pictures of that the other day, and boy, I look young! But so do they actually. I was working with Take That quite a lot back in the day, so I've been involved with Childline since starting in

TV. Being ambassador feels right really.

You should get Take That to do it again.

Might they do it? I think maybe now they're married with kids they wouldn't want to embarrass their children! It's worth a shot though isn't it? "Hey Gary, I've got an idea for you..."

Do you do much stuff in Essex?

We're the most listened-to station in Essex so it's really nice to see that Essex are embracing it, and everyone loves Martin and Sue and have done for years. It's great when you get out and about because people see the Heart truck and really warm to it. When I'm broadcasting my show, I do quite a lot of links just for Essex. I can kind of hijack the transmitter – legally – and record links for Essex, so tomorrow I'll be saying "hi" to Hal and the team at Essex Air Ambulance and only Essex will hear it. It's clever technology we've got.

What do you make of it here?

I love it! I love the fact there's a Wimpy in Colchester. That made it for me! Colchester is actually the first Heart that we came to when it became Heart about a year and a half ago. We have happy memories of that!

Going back to the beginning, have you always wanted to be a presenter?

The thing is, I fell into it completely. I wanted to be on the radio from when I was seven or eight because I just loved music and the whole concept of radio. Without sounding like an anorak, I used to love the way it works and everything! When I graduated with my Psychology degree, I was going to do a post-grad and then go to an ad agency. I did go to an ad agency for a short amount of time.

I hadn't really thought about being a TV presenter, thought it would be impossible, so I never really entertained the thought. What happened was, a friend had a junior job on Going Live at the time. He brought me along to watch the Christmas Show, and there was a drinks party afterwards. A guy came up and said "I hear you do a bit of hospital radio" and we had a chat and that was it. Two or three days later my friend tells me that guy is about to become the boss of CBBC, he's launching The O-Zone, and thought you might fit in, so that was it! I think at the time they had an idea of what they wanted. They had Andi Peters and Philippa Forrester and they wanted another guy to come in and do The O-Zone and Smash Hits.

Literally, within a couple of weeks, I had two meetings, an audition, and then a call at home saying "you've got the job!" I was very lucky, and in those days, there weren't that many channels. Nickelodeon was just starting, but it was really just BBC1. Me, Zoe Ball, Andi Peters, all of us lot were doing all of the shows. It was an amazing opportunity to get at that time.

You've now done radio, TV and theatre. Which of these do you prefer?

They're all so different. Doing Grease last year was amazing. I never dreamt I would do a West End show. And again, that came about through talking to somebody at the right time. To go on stage and play Teen Angel was incredible, because everyone loves the film, and all the songs. I still can't believe I did it. You know, to put on a white suit every night and glide down the staircase to beautiful angels either side, it's a tough job really!

You're on stage in front of 10,000 people in the theatre, and that's very nerve-wracking, very intimate. You see people's faces! Radio's very different because you're in a room where you can't see anybody. And I really adore it. That's my dream job. Radio is The One. It's what I always wanted to do.

Is it strange not seeing who you're talking to?

There are people in front of the glass, trying to put me off sometimes [laughs]. But I do think about the people listening, in the car or at home, or with a hangover in an office! Sitting there, having a bit of banter, playing some records, is great.

Have you always been quite confident or do you think that's happened since you've been doing the telly?

I do get very nervous - not so much on the radio now because I do it six days a week. With Grease I got bad stage fright every night. My heart was going, and I was thinking I'll forget the words or something. But having those nerves is really important.

With the radio, I don't get nervous. I get excited. I can't wait to go on. It's more of a buzz really.

What do you do to beat the stage fright?

There's nothing you can do really because you're just waiting in the wings. The first bit I had to do actually was play Vince Fontaine; "Hey baby. It's the main brain Vince Fontaine coming at you." The thing is I said "coming at you live from the big Heart." When Heart went in, it got a little bit of a cheer. Doing that part was great because you were playing the part of a DJ, obviously an old 50s DJ with a wig and big shoulder pads and everything. But some nights I could just see faces. When you clock faces, especially if they're just going [pulls gormless face, laughs], it puts you off. So you feel very exposed and I think you need a certain amount of confidence - or madness - to do something like that!

Toby Anstis presents the weekday morning show from 10am to 1pm on Heart in Colchester, available on 96.1 FM, digital and online at heart.co.uk



REBEL INK TATTOO AND PIERCING STUDIO

23 BARRACK STREET COLCHESTER CO1 2LL
TEL 07918838987
BESPOKE TATTOOS OUR SPECIALITY
15% DISCOUNT FOR SERVICES PERSONNEL



Low Cost Websites

- Up to 4 pages
- Easy to use Content Management System
- Contact Form
- Limited Time Offer **£349**

Please call for further details
01206 700277

15 Queen Street, Colchester, Essex, CO1 2PH
www.77studios.com | info@77studios.com