

Tony Blackburn citation - speech for Nick Grimshaw

I'm going to get onto his awards and achievements and the serious stuff in a minute, but I want to start by saying a massive thank you to Tony Blackburn for putting a smile on the nation's face for over 50 years.

Tony's been at the top of the business for all that time because he has that rare gift of being able to instantly connect with people.

He's on record as saying, 'I'm not a showbiz person. I just enjoy talking nonsense on the radio.'

Well, nothing wrong with *that*...

But it means that when Tony's on, it's like a mate talking to you directly. He once said that people listen to the radio for a friend, and his unique style has made him a friend to millions for over half a century.

And this is that moment 50 years ago, when not only did he launch BBC Radio 1 but captured the heart of a nation.

VT: Tony Radio 1 (19") ** images will start floating in across rest of speech

Right from the beginning, there's been a sense of mischief about him, that I think people warm to.

When Tony found himself sitting next to Brian May – the lead guitarist of Queen – he didn't do what most radio presenters would do. He didn't wax lyrical about the band's ground-breaking single, Bohemian Rhapsody, or their revolutionary musical style.

No. He said, 'That record of yours – Bohemian Rhapsody. God, it's long!' And when a slightly bemused Brian asked him, 'Don't you like it?' Tony admitted he'd never actually sat through it all, and then said the immortal words, 'It's a very useful record, though, for a disc jockey. It gives you enough time to go to the loo and back when you're on air.'

He had another run in with a music legend when he got a phone call from a guy with an American accent. The caller told him who he was and asked him to play a record for him. Tony said, 'Ha ha, very funny' and promptly hung up. Later on he found out that it really had been Frank Sinatra. But typical of Tony, he did it his way.

His dad was a doctor but thankfully for us, Tony never wanted to go into the medical profession, because he can't stand the sight of blood. He always knew he wanted to be in entertainment and initially had a crack at being a singer.

In fact, did you know, Mr Tony Blackburn had a top 40 hit with *So Much Love*? The story goes that the record was in demand but then the pressing plant making it went on strike, so nobody could get hold of it. With his typically self-deprecating humour, Tony later reckoned, 'I don't think the strike was anything to do with the record, though it *might* have been a quality control issue!'

Tony was born to be a radio presenter, though. In 1964 he started working on Radio Caroline, the most famous pirate radio station in history. His parents were as supportive as ever and his dad even built a massive mast in their garden so they could hear his show, because the reception in Poole, where his family lived, was so bad.

Tony aced it at Radio Caroline, then spent time spinning at the Big L and finally joined the BBC in 1967. That was the year he helped launch Radio One. Whatever happened to that, eh?

He was one of the very first presenters to speak on the station and in his 17 years there, he became known for his infectious humour and upbeat choice of music. But Tony was also instrumental in making his beloved soul music mainstream. He later said, 'I didn't want it to be a niche thing, I wanted to bring it to a mass audience.'

In his long and illustrious career, he's broadcast on Capital Gold, Real Radio, Classic Gold, Smooth Radio, Jazz FM, BBC London, the Magic network and of course, BBC Radio 2. He's had TV shows, hosted countless concerts and back in the 60s and 70s no Christmas stocking was complete without the Tony Blackburn annual!

He became even better known to millions of viewers when he won the very first series of I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here! I think scooping the King of the Jungle crown shows how much the British public loves Tony and holds a real fondness for his down-to-earth, sunny style. And typical Tony - while many of the show's contestants complained about the lack of food, the rough jungle environment and the absence of luxuries, Tony's main gripe was having to share a camp with Uri Geller because he kept ruining all the tea spoons!

In 2014 Tony Blackburn became the first person ever to be awarded a Second Gold Award from the Radio Academy who recognised him as 'an icon of British Broadcasting with a commitment to and a love for radio that remains unmatched by just about anyone in the medium today.'

Dead right. In other words, to use the title of his autobiography, he's Poptastic!

When Tony returned to Radio 2 last year, the first record he played was a track that sums up his optimism, enduring appeal and well-deserved longevity. That record? Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive*.

And he helped Radio 1 celebrate it's 50th Anniversary this year, and joined me on my show with his usual sense of fun!

VT: Nick and Tony YMCA (20")

For all the fun, Tony is a modest guy when it comes to showbiz and once commented, 'People are just people, aren't they?' Well, not quite.

Some people make the world a little bit brighter when it can feel very dark. Some people are just stars.

Thank you again, Tony Blackburn, for being one of them.

I'd like to present the Gold award to Tony Blackburn....

AUDIO: YMCA (Tony's favourite track of all time!)

END