

# Fun and games



*Radio 1 DJ and UEA graduate Greg James talks to ANNE GIACOMANTONIO about student life*

↙ The newspapers can be full of doom and gloom around graduation. Ignore them. Instead, take a leaf out of the book of the new BBC Radio 1 DJ talent Greg Milward (aka Greg James), whose professional radio career kicked off early in his university career.

Those who get up with the sparrows will be familiar with James's affable tones on his early-morning breakfast programme. There's no better "good morning" to wake up to.

I caught him as he returned to his show after the madness of his first Glastonbury festival. "It was ridiculously good – I'm a proper Glastonbury convert," he enthuses. At 23, it's no surprise he's full of

energy. What is a surprise is that, listening to him on the radio, he has that energy at 4am every day.

James bagged his radio slot when he won the "Best Male Presenter" at the Student Radio Awards in 2005, and was given the opportunity to record an hour-long programme to be broadcast on Radio 1.

His producer for that original show was so impressed, they asked him to come in to cover for five

days on the early breakfast slot he now occupies. "I was so nervous, I couldn't sit down and I couldn't sleep. I remember it vividly," says James.

He's clearly crazy about radio. He had his sights set on being a DJ from the age of nine, as soon as he discovered that this was a hobby you could actually get paid for doing. At school, he volunteered at a hospital radio station, but the shows "never got broadcast

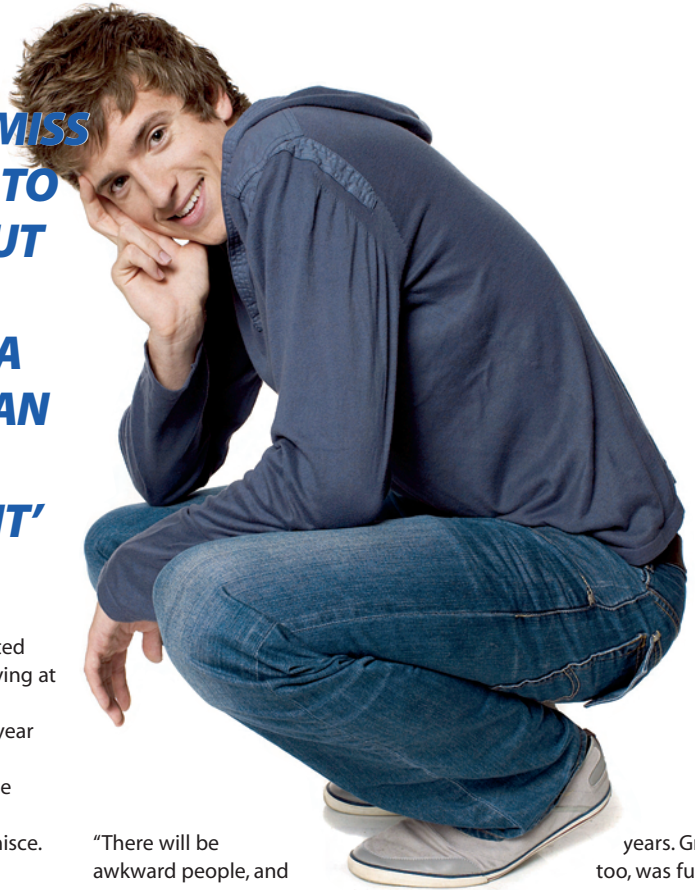
because the transmitters broke". In his first year studying English and drama at the University of East Anglia, he joined the student radio society and was given charge of a programme in the first term.

"There are a lot of student radio stations and ours wasn't particularly brilliant, but it was better than a lot of them. It had a big student following on campus and decent studios."

Not content with filling his free time on campus broadcasting, Greg spent his weekends helping out at BBC Radio Norfolk, while his holidays were filled covering shifts at the Newcastle station Galaxy. He also had his first taste of being a professional radio DJ by university jobbing for the then Sky Digital station Pulse Unsigned. >

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So now he has a career in radio, does it live up to his expectations? "It's a difficult job," James

admits, although it's the off-air organisation he finds "quite stressful, not the show. The best thing about it is the three hours when I do my show, it's a release.

"I do genuinely love that show and I feel really lucky to have it. Every day you go in and it's kind of a blank canvas and it really excites me because I like doing whatever and not having too much scripted business."

He also gets to cover Scott Mills' drive-time shifts from time to time, broadcasting to 5.5 million listeners. "That's kind of like a mini holiday for me to go and have a lie-in for the week – it's really good fun."

From the sound of it, most of James's adult life has been "really good fun".

"I had an amazing time at university. It was three brilliant

years of doing what you wanted really and doing a bit of studying at the same time," he says.

He lived in halls in his first year before moving in with some course-mates, one of whom he moved to London with after university. He pauses to reminisce. "I miss it, actually. I miss not worrying about anything. You kind of make up worries when you're at university, so in comparison to the real world it's so easy, really. You're living with your best mates, and your parents are nowhere near you – and you've got a student loan to spend. It's so brilliant!"

He points out, however, that his first couple of weeks as a fresher were a little odd. Having an off-campus girlfriend, being away from his parents and "sorting out what you're going to eat every night and when you're going to change your bed sheets. It's all a bit funny and you have to be grown up really quickly."

But he says that the antidote is to just get out there and join in.

"There will be awkward people, and I met loads of those, but you suddenly realise you'll get through it and find out who you really get on with. Just try and meet as many different people as you possibly can."

James also decided to drop the English element of his degree course after a year and a half.

"I wanted to concentrate on my radio stuff and to do practical drama, because the performance side of it was more beneficial to what I wanted to do," James says.

The decision was tough at the time, but it paid off. Surviving on toast, cereal and takeaways, Greg says that he enjoyed his studies a lot more in the second and third

years. Graduation, too, was full of mixed emotions as James broadcast his first Radio 1 show the following day. "It was a bit like: 'Yes guys, I'm really sorry to be leaving you – but I have got to do this show on Radio 1. I'm a bit busy now, bye bye.'"

In other words, while it was an exciting time, James had no time to celebrate his university success before facing his next huge challenge. No matter. It's been onwards and upwards since then. His show has been going strong for almost two years and, judging by the prestigious slots they throw his way, the station clearly has faith in him. Who knows whose pop radio boots he might fill next?