

AJ ⇌ DJ

You probably know him as an affable morning DJ, a purveyor of sometimes infuriatingly difficult Mystery Song Collections and Five Thousand Dollar Minutes, or as a man who loves the racetrack. But chances are you didn't know 92.5 Gold-FM's Adrian Johnston made his radio debut at the tender age of eight, or that he scored his first paying announcer's gig through the CES [Centrelink].

Now before all you aspiring radio announcers scramble off to the nearest Centrelink office, I should point out that when Adrian - or AJ, as he's affectionately known - got the said announcing job, he was no greenhorn. In fact, he had a wealth of experience behind him - all gained in the radio station he'd set up at home.

'I always loved music when I was growing up in Devonport in Tasmania,' AJ says. 'I was a passionate collector of 45rpm singles, and figured that, as I didn't have the voice to be a rock star, the next best thing would be to be a DJ. So that led to my setting up a radio station in my bedroom when I was around eight years old. I had the whole set-up - turntables, a wooden microphone and a little panel with the name of the local radio station (7AD) - on it. And I set up speakers all around the house, and drove my family completely bonkers with it all.'

'Radio programming has been taken over by computers now, but in those days, radio shows were run off what was called a 'log'; a sheet with the times written in, and all the ad breaks and so on. So I used to write up the logs and advertisements, and read the advertisements as well. And file it all away afterwards, of course.'

Having honed his announcing skills at his home studio, AJ found his reputation had preceded him, and his inevitable move into commercial radio came much earlier than expected. 'I played football with the son of a guy who ran a half-hour programme about the Devonport Junior Australian Rules Football League on the local radio station,' remembers AJ. 'He knew about my passion for radio, and said: "Since you like radio so much, you should come and sit in on the show." So I went along there each week as the sole kid among the grown-ups.'

Fast-forward now to the age of fourteen, and AJ entered - and won - a junior disc jockey competition run by a neighbouring radio station, 7BU. But ignoring this success and the ever-loudening call of commercial radio, he pressed on with his education, and decided instead to study fine art. Then when boredom set in, it was time for Plan B and the obligatory interview with the CES.

'The guy at the CES asked me what I wanted to do,' AJ recalls, 'and I said "It's no use me telling you what I want to do; you'll never be able to get me a job doing that." "I can't if you don't tell me what it is," he said. So I told him I wanted to work in radio, and it turned out that his brother-in-law was the manager of 7HT in Hobart. And through his brother-in-law, the CES guy was able to get me a midnight-to-dawn announcing job at 7HT. My interview was on the Friday, and I started work at the station the following Monday.'

No small ask for the then-sixteen-year-old. But AJ rose to the challenge, learning all aspects of the job and developing his own style, that fundamental tool-of-trade the radio announcer can only learn by doing. The popularity of on-air personalities, AJ says, is a key part of any radio station's success, as evidenced by the long-running success of his Gold-FM stablemates and breakfast show hosts, Richard Fowler and Sarah Wharmby.

Graduating from on-air announcing, AJ next became a Programme Director, but found 'I sat in too many meetings, and I didn't find that fun at all.' Preferring to deal with music and an audience than with the bottom line, he leapt back behind the

microphone, where he remains today, zealously balancing a blend of announcing and programming duties.

'For me, music is the soul of life,' says AJ. 'I tend to spend a lot of time listening to new music in the car, plus we get stacks of CDs left here [in the office] each week by the record company representatives. There aren't many jobs where you can play whatever music you like on your PC when you go in to work. So for me it's great.'

This all sounds too good to be true; surely there's a downside to AJ's profession? 'With the programming - just like with newspapers - I always have to be ahead with the music, so the deadlines can get you down a bit,' he says. 'And there's the ongoing need for change; you have to be constantly assessing trends and moving with them, which, with human nature being as it is, can sometimes seem difficult.'

'But having said that, the constant atmosphere of change is also a positive [of the job]; it really is something to look forward to because it always brings new things. It's like living on the edge, and you get a real buzz out of it.'

And what's the best aspect of the job? AJ thinks long and hard over this one; then, finally: 'Meeting interesting people; there's a real amalgam of new people to meet,' he says, 'because there's always someone coming through the radio station, ranging from artists who come in to be interviewed right through to other radio station personnel and record company people.'

'And it's fun. Although - like any job - it has its moments, it's always fun. For me, the music will always inspire fun, and I still yearn for that.'