

Kiss & tell

Rising star Clara Amfo guides *Music Week* through her journey from Kiss FM intern to Radio 1, reveals her broadcasting heroes and explains why the Live Lounge is vital for the biz...

BY ANDRE PAINE

When *Music Week* catches up with Clara Amfo, it's the day after the Hyundai Mercury Prize ceremony and she admits to a late night following her judging stint. Despite only getting a couple of hours' sleep before that morning's Radio 1 show, she's still buzzing from the Mercury win for Sampha ("It's such a beautiful record") and the post-awards party. And Amfo is just as passionate about her day job...

What are your earliest memories of Radio 1?

"My first memories are definitely of Sara Cox. To this day, she's one of my favourite presenters. She just has a very warm vibe about her. She does that thing that all presenters strive for, which is to talk to your listener like they are your mate. I just remember listening to her and laughing out loud. Sara's adventures with [basset hound] Snoop are legendary."

Who are your Radio 1 favourites from over the years?

"I loved Sara Cox, I liked Trevor [Nelson] - he will sell different tunes to me that I haven't heard before. As corny as it may seem, I have a huge amount of love and respect for Annie [Mac], Grimmy [Nick Grimshaw] and Gemma Cairney. You listen to them and you think, 'This is quite intimate, this is quite casual'. Certainly that's what I love from radio. Obviously you are talking to millions of people, but I always try to talk to just one person."

Was it always a dream to work at Radio 1?

"Yeah, I'm the fifth out of six children from a second generation British-Ghanaian family. I grew up in a noisy household so being able to make myself heard is a skill I've had from birth. My brothers were into different types of music, so I listened to everything from garage to rock music, hip-hop and grime. I would go on long drives with my dad and he would listen to pirate stations when we'd be driving to south London to the African food market. One of my older brothers was involved in pirate radio, particularly around the birth of UK garage. So I always had a respect and love for radio."

How did you get into it?

"I started working on radio at Kiss FM as a marketing intern. It was one of the most fun experiences of my career. I got to go backstage at Lovebox, it was really exciting."

How did you make it on air?

"By talking too much and being really persistent. I loved my job - I'd got upgraded to station coordinator. I was always arguing with [programme director] Andy Roberts about the playlist. He let me

cover a show at Christmas. He saw that I was really serious. Then he let me do the pre-breakfast show. I would do my office job and stay after work and pre-record that show."

So how did you end up at Radio 1?

"I made a demo for 1Xtra one day after work at Kiss when all the people had gone home - I sneaked into a studio to do it. In June 2013, I left Kiss to do the Weekend Breakfast show on 1Xtra. I did that for about 18 months. During that time I got the Chart Show, and then in February [2015] I got offered the Radio 1 [mid-morning] slot - they asked me to step up and the rest is history."

Did you imagine you'd be on daytime Radio 1?

"Absolutely not. When they offered me the job, I was the most shocked out of everyone. To be honest, I cried, because it was a big moment and it was quite overwhelming."

Do you think the Live Lounge is important for artists?

"Yeah, I had Stormzy on and he said, 'Clara, every time I come into the Live Lounge I get so nervous - you know you've only got one shot and you've got to smash it'. I had quite a lot of messages from people saying, 'What Stormzy does isn't usually my thing but hats off to him'. I love those opinion-changing performances - and that happens with loads of artists."

With the rise of streaming, can Radio 1 remain relevant?

"I believe so. With all the different ways you can listen to music now, people are spoilt for choice. But people do keep coming back because I think there's something to be said for a feature that somebody may enjoy in someone's radio show, or knowing that at this time every day I'm going to hear this person's voice."

Are you tempted to work on digital music platforms like Apple's Beats 1?

"I'm not going anywhere any time soon, trust me. At this point in time, I don't see myself leaving Radio 1. This month in particular - with it being Live Lounge Month - I'm enjoying my show more than I ever have."

Do you think that Radio 1 will still be going strong in another 50 years' time?

"Absolutely, I think we can go for another 100, why not?"

And will you be on air in 2067?

"Look at Annie Nightingale, that woman is living proof of ambition and of longevity. She can rave anyone under the table. I will happily follow in her footsteps."