



JAMES HUMPHRYS

The importance of keeping glass half full.

James is just as refreshing and uplifting in person as he is through his music. Our short and sweet interview via zoom on a gloomy Saturday morning could easily have become a chit-chat for hours. In the short space of time we spoke, I instantly felt more positive and optimistic, something anybody who listens to his music is guaranteed to get a taste of.

We talked lockdown lyrics, the importance of positivity, and navigating through such an extraordinary period of time. Despite being forced to move back home with his parents, he's had an action-packed 15 months, being shortlisted for BBC Radio 1's Live Lounge competition and featured as BBC Introducing South and West's showcase artist.

As we spoke on zoom (starting with some technical difficulties, a fundamental start to con-

versations nowadays), the Bristol-based singer-songwriter said he's been "surprisingly good, despite being forced to move back home to Guildford and being let go of my part-time job."

Some have struggled more than others with a lack of social contact, but for James "The slower pace of life has given me loads of time to create and artists have been lucky to have time to be creative. But this adds pressure to actually BE creative during this time. I've managed to release a few songs, but then there are issues with promotion and so on."

Humphry's four-track EP *Memory Palace* was released in June 2020, the high-spirited summer tune "*All The Same*" is so infectious it's hard not to bop along whilst listening. James explained that this was aptly written before lockdown whilst working at sea in a 'tiny cabin'

but released during the first lockdown, as an anthem to celebrate and maintain optimism.

"I work in a restaurant part-time and they got rid of me. My girlfriend and I were also supposed to move in together, but COVID hit so we had to move back to our parents' houses." This was the inspiration for his song "*Three Weeks*" released in November last year. That was written over lockdown, and I'm just speaking honestly about love. It's about doing long distance, with one party finding it easier than the other. She was back at her parents and so was I, but I seemed to be coping better. It kinda made me feel bad that I'm doing ok, but I couldn't do anything about it."

The wonderful thing about James' releases over the last 15 months is that in conjunction, he donated, and encouraged others to donate to various charities such as Trussel Trust and Black Minds Matter UK, the latter supported by Head Above The Clouds during their summer raffles.

"Music was therapy" for James through the pandemic. "I made playlists and enjoyed diving into other people's music. I actually did loads of gardening and DIY stuff, I was always fixing or making something." (Something I guarantee was much to his parents' delight!)

Finally back in Bristol, James revealed he's slightly nervous to get back to normal. We discussed socialising and the pressures that young people are facing. "I'm a bit anxious actually. I'm back in Bristol which is very youthful and high-energy. It's a bit overwhelming, I'm back working at the restaurant and people seem to be ruder than before!" However, he followed this by staying true to his optimistic nature and reminded me that we need to stay "glass half full".

I was surprised when we chatted about what we are looking forward to most about normality. My initial thought was that James would be looking forward to performing live, meeting fans, or going back to a studio, but his answer was simple, and it reminded me that we're all in the same boat. "I'm looking forward to some stability and that sense of security. Sometimes I wake up like

'sh*t, I'm 25! However, this time was refreshing and quite freeing. It gave us time to reflect on ourselves. I'm feeling good".

So, what's next?

"On 3rd July I'm performing at Mr. Wolf's in Bristol, my first gig in over a year with a completely new set-list. It's exciting but also nerve-racking. Adding in the stresses of organising a rehearsal, it's the build-up really." But adhering to his quintessentially positive demeanour he followed with "but you know if you're not a bit nervous, something's not right!"

James' heartfelt, optimistic tracks are irresistible, he's honest and vulnerable yet uses catchy riffs and toe-tapping drum beats to explore those issues, providing a conscious reminder that positivity is the way to get through tougher times.

Look out for his new song "*Eyes Up Front*" out on June 11th.

Words: Lauren Ramsay
Photography: Ania Shrimpton