

James Vickery: R'n'B artist with one deaf ear

- 1 Behind James Vickery's left ear is a tiny tattoo, barely noticeable until he turns to point it out. The inking is of a mute icon, a small speaker with a cross next to it, as you would see on a computer or a phone when switching the volume off; a simple image that neatly symbolises the 27-year-old's story.
- 2 In and out of hospital with ear infections as a child, he was eventually, at the age of eight, diagnosed with a growth of abnormal skin cells called a cholesteatoma. His case was severe, doctors said, and his eardrum had to be removed. Surgery went well, but inevitably left Vickery completely deaf in that ear. Unable to distinguish the volume and pitch of his voice, he struggled with his speech and a vocal coach was brought in to help. It was through these sessions he found his voice; not just in conversation, but the distinctive, soulful singing voice that has now seen him hailed as a new face of UK R'n'B.
- 3 "My parents took me to a vocal coach and they wanted me to learn how to basically speak again," he tells Sky News. "A good way is actually by singing because it engages your diaphragm. So we did that and my singing teacher was like, 'you can sing, you can actually sing well'. I was really unconfident because no one could ever hear me speak and so credit to my vocal coach, she really taught me how to not only speak louder, but become a bigger person, you know, really fill the room with your voice. That's something I try and have now in my songs. All the singers I looked up to as a kid had big voices so I always wished I had one."
- 4 His debut album, *Songs That Made Me Feel*, aims to do just what its title says. "The way that people consume music is so passive now," he says. "It's so easily accessible but I think not enough people just sit down and let the music take over. I feel like, as a man growing up, men are taught not to show how they feel, I think. You're taught 'man up'." Men don't talk about their feelings enough, he says. "I managed to be able to do that through song, luckily, by bringing out this soulful album."
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