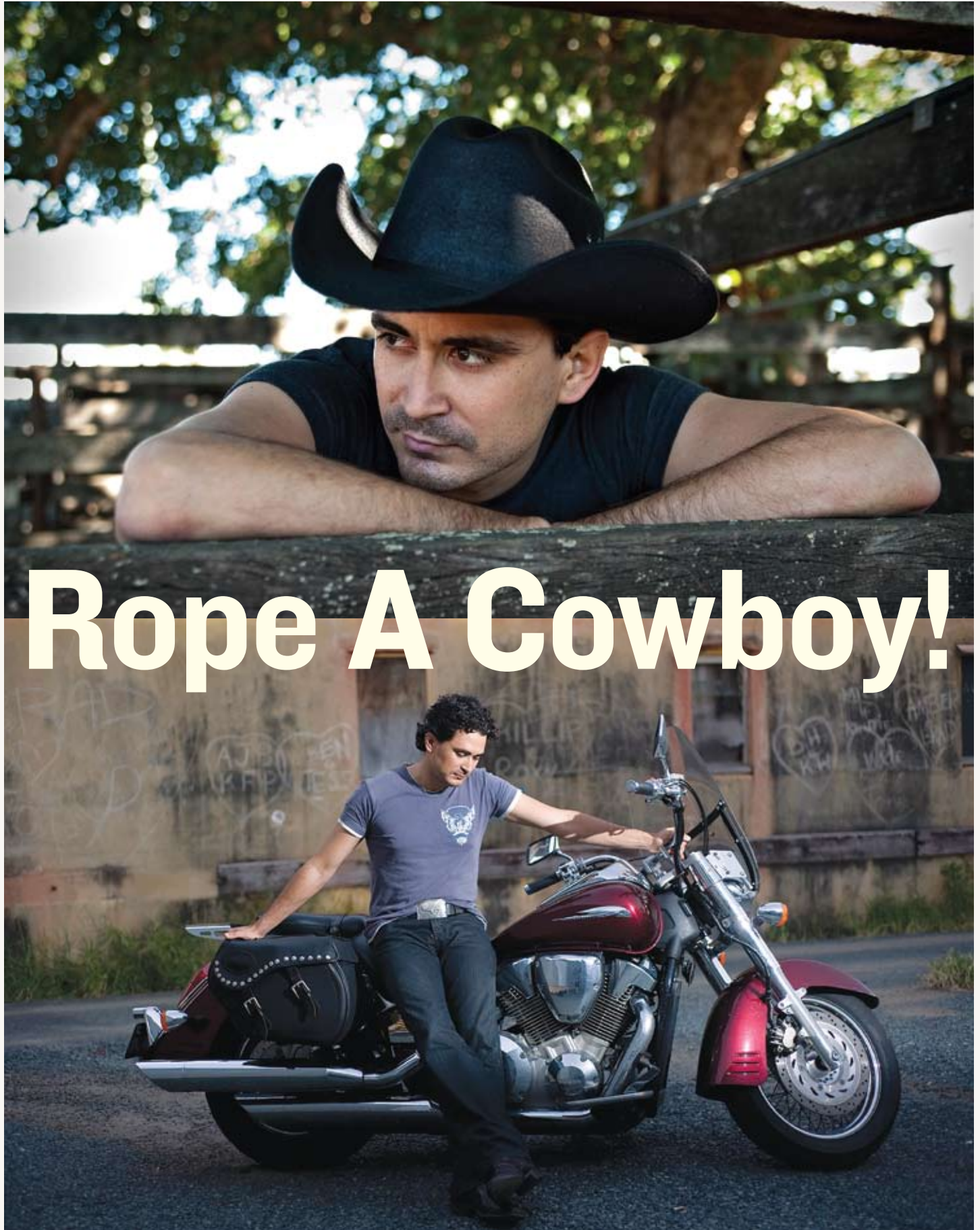


OUR STRAIGHT MATES

With Matthew Myers



Rope A Cowboy!

It's easy to see why this sexy outback boy is garnering fans. Oh, and he happens to make great music! Markus Meier is this month's Straight Mate.

DNA: Congratulations on A Different Land hitting number one on the country charts.

Markus Meier: Thanks very much! It's something I never expected. I started off in quite a humble way and to have a song go to number one... well, it just blows you away!

Has it made a huge difference to your career?

Yeah, people kind of prick up their ears and take more interest. When you start out relatively unknown you're scraping the barrel with everyone else – and there's a lot of people in that barrel! So when a number one happens and all the DJs start playing it, it's amazing. All the people out there who hadn't heard it suddenly think, 'He's got a number one, maybe we should listen.' For lack of a better phrase, it's like sheep – one goes a certain way and the rest follow.

Who have been your musical influences?

Geez, as a kid I didn't have much choice because I grew up in the remote Kimberley in Western Australia. So all I had were Mum and Dad's cassettes and they were very limited to Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley. But when I was a bit older and moved to a bigger city my influences were more along the lines of Bryan

suicide... Certain sensitive topics don't get touched on and I can't work out why that is. I did know about Chely but I don't know of any Australians, off the top of my head.

Country music is definitely a niche compared to where George Michael or Lady Gaga sit.

But we're trying to break down some of the barriers. It's such a wide audience, from kids to 70-year-olds. It's hard to please such a varied range. I'm a bit more contemporary county rock and whether it's a touchy subject like sexuality or depression, or even just a music style like a song having more than three chords, we're trying to break down barriers. But it's a really slow process.

Have you heard the Willie Nelson song, Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond Of Each Other?

No, I haven't. I'll have to Google it! Willie Nelson has always been outside the square and never one to conform. A lot of big American acts conform, but he's been known as a bit of a law-breaker. He's definitely a character and likes to stretch the boundaries.

He also provided music for Brokeback Mountain. Did you see that film?

“One of my best friends is gay and he's only recently been able to come out.”

Adams and John Cougar Mellencamp.

That's interesting, because there's an element of them in your music and videos.

That's a real compliment. I know they're old-school, but they're awesome. With my *Rope A Cowgirl* video I did research on YouTube and looked at a lot of Easybeats, Rolling Stones and Beatles music videos. There's something about the old black and white image that's really cool and has a great vibe about it. I wanted to reproduce it and I even tried to mimic a bit of the Johnny Cash guitar strumming. It's certainly not how you'd play on stage, but it looks good in a video.

Who would you rather be the support act to – Pink, Kylie, Madonna or Lady Gaga?

I'd have to say Kylie. I think she's hot! She's got a great arse. And she sings well, too!

Were you aware that Dolly Parton has something of a gay following?

No, I didn't know that! I think she's making a comeback with a new album.

Chely Wright is an openly gay US country music star. Do you know of any Australian gay country music artists?

Well, country music is very conservative, especially in America. Subjects like that don't often get talked about, which is a real shame. It's not just sexuality, but things like depression,

Yes, I think it's an awesome movie. It's got some seriously good acting and the storyline is fantastic. Some movies these days lack a compelling storyline, whereas that has it in droves. Even the cinematography is great. It's an all-round winner and if anyone doesn't see it because of the content they are missing out big time. And Heath Ledger's death is a huge loss. To think it was early days for him and he was giving performances like that!

Do you have any gay mates?

Yes, I have a lot. I was in high school in the '90s and people were doing what they wanted to do. I had friends who used to wear nail polish and make-up to school and a lot of the kids were really against it, in some instances actually violent. I never saw it that way. I try to see a person for who they are. If you like a person it doesn't matter what their dress sense or sexual preference is. One of my best friends is gay and he's only recently been able to come out. He's a bit older than me and it's taken him a long time to be able to do it. But I've always known, as his friend.

So you saw homophobia in school?

Absolutely. There were groups in school like that and it's still around today. A lot of the goth and emo groups get ostracized and I personally don't like it. Kids can be

really cruel and I find it disturbing. Even the teachers were kind of opposed to it. They get picked on a fair bit because they dare to be a little different from what people consider the norm. Who are we to judge?

I reckon there's a song in that.

You're right! There's probably plenty of songs in that and I'd probably get ostracized for singing them [laughs].

Who would you turn gay for?

I'll say Usher. He's got the moves. Great voice, great dancer. Why not?

How do you feel about the fact that a lot of gay guys would find you hot?

I have no problem with that. No problem at all. I have lots of gay mates and one in particular who felt, many years ago, that we may have had something. I'm not that way inclined, but if I was I would have gone on a date with him. But he realised this and we've had a stronger relationship as mates ever since.

Country music festivals can get huge audiences, up to 70,000 people. Do you ever get nervous going on stage?

I don't get nervous, I get anxious. I really enjoy performing and get a bit of a vibe before going on stage. Because I started quite young I kind of got used to performing in front of people.

As a ten-year-old I started busking in the Darwin mall and you're really putting yourself out there. It's like reality TV and you have to do something special to make people throw a gold coin. But having an apprenticeship like busking and talent quests gives a good preparation for the bigger festivals.

Ever had a wardrobe malfunction on stage?

[Laughing] Absolutely! One time I was playing at the Tamworth Country Music Festival and a lady threw a leopard G-string at me and it landed on my guitar neck. I decided to put in on over my jeans. But as I put my leg through it, I tripped and fell off the stage. I got back up and kept singing, but it was quite embarrassing and there was even a photo in the paper.

Who's been your biggest influence in life?

Probably my friends. I don't have a lot, due to all my time on tour and I have a young family, but I have a handful of really close friends who are 10 to 15 years older than me. I look up to them and learn from their advice.

Jocks, boxer briefs or freeballing?

I go through stages. I used to do boxers and I like wearing jocks. But these days I find it quite comfortable without and go commando in jeans. If I have good tight jeans, that's fine!

As long as you keep wearing those tight jeans in your videos for us.

I love wearing jeans. I know it's a bit of a country cliché, but even around the house and garden I have my jeans on and nothing else. And a pair of jeans last for ages. You can leave them hanging on the couch or the bed. They're an ingenious invention. I love em!

A Different Land is out now. Visit markusmeier.com.au