

back in **BLACK**

Smouldering Tex Perkins is wowing audiences as Johnny Cash in *The Man In Black*. He spoke to Matt Myers about knocking one back with Iggy Pop, unsafe sex with Marcus Graham and his old band The Poofers.



DNA: Congratulations! *The Man In Black* has been getting very high praise. What do you think makes it so successful?

Tex Perkins: Me [laughs]! I am joking, but there is an element of truth to that. The role of Cash has been waiting for me all my life! Well, to be quite serious, with my first band, the Dum Dums back in 1982, we played Johnny Cash for half of our set. So I kind of learned to sing by doing Johnny Cash. They were very simple and achievable songs and that's what attracted us, as post-punk kids wanting to branch out. My voice suited that material, way back when I was 17. Now, 27 years later, I've gone full circle.

In your research of Johnny Cash, what was the most fascinating thing you discovered about the man?

It wasn't so much about him... in my research I stumbled across the Joaquin Phoenix questionable insanity thing! I watched a few Johnny clips on YouTube and it led me to all that

“Sex appeal at a distance is what I've got!”

Joaquin Phoenix stuff. So from my perspective, it looks like the last man who played Johnny Cash went... [leaping forward] INSANE!

If he were alive today, what would you want to ask him?

I would ask him about his longevity and stamina. One thing that I did discover was that he had a drug addiction all his life, and there was no real period where he was over it. To go that hard for that long is fascinating. It's inspirational to me, but probably not in a good way. I mean, us mere mortals see it and think, “Well, he did it. Maybe I can!”

You played a part in the AIDS education prison movie *Dead Set*, where your character rapes Marcus Graham. That's a pretty dramatic role!

[Laughs] Well, I didn't have to physically do it. It was only implied. I played a prison rapist who raped Marcus Graham's character and got AIDS! Angry Anderson played the wise old crim and I can still remember his line. Me and this other guy were discussing how you get AIDS and what you should do. Angry says, “They say smoking a bloke's a lot safer, you know? Head jobs. Just as long as ya don't get cum in the cuts of ya mouth!” It was a really poorly made film, but I guess it got the message across.

If you could choose any rock star, living or dead, to have a beer with, who would it be?

I had a beer with Iggy Pop, who is one of my favourite rock stars. He's an absolute sweetheart. A lovely man. Hmm... it'd have to be Elvis. Not that I'm particularly obsessed with him, but you may as well go with the top.

When you were growing up, were you ever into bands like Queen, The Smiths or any

New Romantic stuff?

No, but I love Queen now. I'm one of their biggest fans. When I first heard The Smiths I was absolutely appalled! But it was too early for me to realise the humour and irony. But when I listened to songs like *Girlfriend In A Coma* and *You're The One For Me, Fatty*, I thought, “Okay, I get Morrissey now.”

You showed your gay-friendly side when you collaborated with Paul Mac on the song *Heatseeking Pleasure Machine*.

What! He's gay?!

Afraid so. What was that experience like?

He was working on *Good News Week*, doing their music, and my band appeared on the show. He approached me backstage and gave me his CD. I'd never heard of Paul Mac but I listened to it and thought it was cool. Paul didn't have a reputation at that point but he was once in a similar alternative band called Smash Mac Mac. I think I was the first person that he approached for that whole project and

none of the other songs are anything like the one we did. It's probably the only one that truly expresses his nightclub gay side. We never got around to it, but I was really keen to do a club video based on the Al Pacino movie *Cruising*. I wanted to have Paul Mac crowd surfing on thousands of leather men!

Were you really in a band called *The Poofsters*?

Yes!

Was it tongue in cheek?

Well, I didn't name that band. It was my friend Lachlan McLeod who was in the band. He came from Broken Hill and I had a similar experience growing up in Brisbane, where we were called poofsters daily. In Broken Hill, especially, if you had a yellow T-shirt or wore your hair over your ears or did... basically anything, you were called a poofster. Especially if you were caught reading a book or listening to music. So we were kind of claiming our insults.

Has anyone ever mistaken you as gay?

I don't know if I've been mistaken as gay, but I've definitely had guys come on to me. I'm quite happy to be camp, though. My friend Tim Rogers [musician] and I were deeply in love for a while. We never made love but we had that total feeling where you want to be around each other constantly. I don't think we ever crossed a line and kissed or anything. A lot of my friends are very physical and hug each other and that might look gay to people.

As a musician, who would you say are your major influences?

Back in the beginning there was a band called The Cramps. As a 16-year-old, they were it! They were rockabilly with a punky alternative edge to them. They were very much into that John Waters-style trash culture. Alice Cooper

was a big influence and still is! Then there's Iggy Pop. But also Johnny fucking Cash! He's the archetypal man against the system.

Which gay icon do you admire the most?

Quentin Crisp! He's the archetypal witty gay man who survived on his wit. I've always loved him.

Are you aware of your manly sex appeal?

Yes, I suppose, but I'm still yet to really understand it.

How do you feel about the fact that guys find you hot?

Well, you can't control that. I mean hot is hot, isn't it? [Laughs] I have no problem with that. But people never tell me these things and it's usually journalists like yourself who'll say, “When I said I was going to interview you, the girls at the office were like, ‘Oh wow!’” But when they get up close they realise how different it is! Sex appeal at a distance is what I've got!

You worked on the *Beautiful Kate* movie soundtrack. Is this something you may pursue again in the future?

Yeah, but it's not something you can pursue.

You have to be asked.

Jocks, boxers or freeballer?

I'm a boxer bloke. I was a devout freeballer until a few years back in Newcastle. I was performing at a pub and didn't have accommodation for the night so I got dressed backstage and put on a pair of very old jeans. For the first two songs I was standing up but for the third I was sitting on a stool. When the song finished I noticed a young man making his way through the crowd. He leaned up, put one hand to his face and said, “Your dick's hanging out!” It was one of those Hitchcock film moments.

Ouch! Embarrassing?

The room spun and everything went into slow motion. I looked down and, sure enough, where there had been a tattered patch was now a gaping hole. And there it was, its cute little head against my upper thigh. I've heard of musicians barring up on stage but I'm quite the opposite. Funny thing was, a few minutes earlier while I was singing, my inner dialogue went something like, “Hmm, my dick feels weird... stop thinking about your dick for two minutes will you? But... SHUT UP ABOUT YOUR DICK!” So now I always wear undies! ★

Go to themaninblack.com.au for more.

