

Idle Hands



The Whitlams front man Tim Freedman on ABBA, gay marriage and, of course, our former prime minister.

DNA: How did the concept for your new solo album, *Australian Idle* come about?

Tim: The musical aesthetic came from '70's pop, from Elton John to Gilbert O'Sullivan to Cat Stevens. The title comes from my life as an Eastern suburbs housewife over the past few years, where it's been lunching with friends, a little charity work and picking up the kid from school. And who doesn't love a pun?

The front cover has a Rolling Stones, *Made In The Shade* feel to it.

I didn't have that actual album, it's one gap in my Stones collection. But the art direction for that came from *The Graduate*, where young Dustin Hoffman escapes from conventional life into the pool, which is what I try and do most days. I watched the movie a couple of months ago and it's dated really well. I love that scene, but I love pools anyway. It fitted the album title and it all looks so indie, so it worked for me on a few levels.

The song *Old Man* seems to have a Boz Scaggs cum Fleetwood Mac flavour.

Wow, that's great. I loved the big Boz Scaggs record *Silk Degrees*, when I was a teenager and I was actually thinking of doing a song from it in my show. I was never into Fleetwood Mac much, but I suppose they are one band that can get into you through the radio. The song did

cover – that is hot. But I also love Shirley Bassey and Cleo Laine. These days I see Meow Meow whenever she plays Sydney. I love her, she's like a cross between Liza Minnelli and Dame Edna Everage.

Were you a fan of Amy Winehouse?

I liked *Back In Black*, with *Rehab* and all, but I didn't follow the soap opera surrounding her. I find drug abuse a bit of a bore. I don't think she was really doing anything different to the soul divas of 30 or 40 years ago. She was very talented, but to be honest I don't think she was doing anything new. I mean, if you're brought up on Bassey and Eartha Kitt then Amy Winehouse wouldn't have that much of an effect. But I can imagine 15-year-olds hearing her and being blown away. It was a wonderful career and a sad ending. She just wasn't phenomenal in my eyes.

Kate Bush is a gay man's diva outside of the square. Are you into her?

Kate Bush in the tank top around the *Babooshka* era – I had that poster on the back door of my loo in the '80s. Tori Amos also made my heart flutter for a long time, but Kate Bush with red hair – it doesn't get any better for me. In one of my bands I used to do a version of *The Man With The Child In His Eyes*. I was surprised once when I walked into a party

What's the campest thing in your house?

Hmm... on my corkboard I have a polaroid of Peter Allen performing at Tweed Heads. The stage manager up there gave it to me when I commented that I'd seen Peter perform in the same room. Is that camp? I'm ashamed to say my place is like a university student's etch pad. There are lovely little girly spaces, such as my daughter's bedroom, but my space hasn't really developed. I'm afraid I don't have a great eye for interior design.

You once did a beautiful rendition of *Tenterfield Saddler*. Has Peter Allen been an influence on your music?

I suppose he has a bit, but I mainly admire his attitude to showbiz and his tenacity. I loved his life and his chutzpah. I've seen *The Boy From Oz* with Todd in Sydney and with Hugh in New York and even in Chatswood last year. It's an inspiring story, but it was always a bit sad when you saw the real thing, though. I think he was sort of rougher than Todd and Hugh. In a way, he was a bit more black stump. I sang *Tenterfield Saddler* on centre court before an Australian Open tennis final. It was before the whole *Boy From Oz* thing. I was never pulled up on it, but I changed the words in the outro to, "Give her a traveller or you'll never see the end of her." In New Orleans and Melbourne you could take a drink from pub to pub, but Sydney has never been that civilised. My favourite of Peter's songs is *Don't Cry Out Loud*.

There is a lovely photo of your daughter meeting Gough Whitlam. That must have been an awesome moment for you...

Indeed. Every moment with The Leader is cherished.

When you first formed The Whitlams, what about the former prime minister resonated so much with you?

Whitlam, kangaroos, meat pies and Holden cars! Remember the jingle? It was the nostalgia, I think, mixed with the sheer class of he and Margaret. I used to go and have lunch in his office a couple of times a year, but I haven't been for about a year. I had afternoon tea with Margaret about six months ago. Margaret is wonderful. I took her to a few concerts a few years back. She needs young gentleman to step out with.

Gay marriage. Are you for it?

Of course. I think there should not only be gay marriage, but gay breeding. But seriously, it's inevitable that it will happen one day. Look, I know some really bad straight parents and I know some really great gay parents. When you've had that experience with people, it's a no-brainer.

Are you into designer underwear, plain jocks or pure freeballing?

Ha! That depends on what time of the washing cycle it is. When you think about it, undies are the opposite of wine, where the lower your cellar gets, the better the wine you open. I'm determined to write a song about that one day, I just haven't gotten around to it.

Australian Idle is out now. For more on Tim Freedman visit timfreedman.com

"I know some bad straight parents and some great gay parents. When you've had that experience with people, it's a no-brainer."

remind me of *My Best Friend* by Queen as I was writing it, but I thought I'd continue even though it was obvious, so I changed the guitar to piano. It's a bit of Freddie Mercury!

And the song *Girlfriend Heaven* has a Paul McCartney flavour.

Oh, even better! I'm too close to it to notice that, but I've doodled with his songs on the piano for decades. I hope it reminds everyone else of him, too! I might sell a few more.

Is there any one band or singer that sits as your favourite?

Randy Newman is the one that speaks to me the strongest, and Daylight is second. There's no doubting that ABBA were the biggest pop sensation of the '70s.

Were you into them?

Yes, I had *Arrival*. I have to say I preferred the brunette to the blonde. But I was also wise enough in primary school to laugh when *The Sun* newspaper had a vote on who were better – ABBA or The Beatles.

Who is Tim Freedman's diva?

I grew up with my dad's record collection and he had 15 Streisand albums. I liked the one where she is Supergirl on the

and Paul Copsis was doing a lovely version of it, too. I've got about three or four of Kate's albums, including *Ariel*, and I have a few of Tori's, too. She's in the same ballpark and very clever.

On the new album there is a song *Peter Brown, The Whitlams' astrologer, who is gay*. Can you shed light on his story?

Peter is an eccentric friend of mine and a very brave misfit. In that song I took him home to sleep in my spare room after I met him on Gilligan's Island, or as the professional drinkers like to call it, Taylor Square Proper. When I woke up he had made a daisy chain and was skipping up and down the lounge room to Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald.

Do you have many close gay mates?

Yeah, half my mates are gay and, especially now that The Newtown has closed, there are some lovely fellows who drink at my local. They're great and we bet on the horses together.

How is your gaydar?

My record label a few years back had just two artists signed – iota and Paul Copsis. Someone recently told me that they are both gay. Who would have thought?