

# Oh Alexander

Singer songwriter Alexander Gow is earning a reputation for his unique style... as well as his model good looks. Matthew Myers discovers the man behind the band Oh Mercy and muses over hysterical underpants.

**DNA: Is Oh Mercy a reference to the Bob Dylan song?**

**Alexander Gow:** Naming a band is one of the strangest things I've ever have to do as a musician. As an 18-year-old, who was super-idealistic and a little confused about the whole process, I looked toward my idols in time of need! We picked Oh Mercy after ruling out a heap of other albums.

**Do you have a favourite track?**

On our most recent album, *Deep Heat*, there's a song called *Still Making Me Pay*. It's probably the most colourful musical arrangement that I've done and lyrically the tongue is firmly in cheek, as it always is. The lyrics are kind of evil. It's probably the most succinct representation of what I was trying to do with the album as a whole.

**Do you ever get confused with the American dance band No Mercy?**

[Laughs] We have a couple of times, but no, we haven't written any acoustic ballads and I haven't been featured in my jocks in our film clips! So the similarities end there!

**You've had very colourful, even camp album covers (*Great Barrier Grief* had a Ken Done original). Your latest album *Deep Heat* has a Mardi Gras-like parade with a near-naked woman surrounded by men in gold space suits. Where do the ideas come from?**

That one in particular is from the Rio Carnival in 1985. After high school, I studied fine art. Specifically, I focused on a photographer called Rennie Ellis – an Australian who did short documentary work in the '70s and '80. I was really interested in his work and after being lucky enough to have Ken Done paint a nude for our second album, it put us on a platform where I was able to approach the estate of Rennie Ellis, who has been dead for a number of years now. I needed a provocative photo to fit in with *Deep Heat* and they agreed to let us use the cover shot.

**Do you have gay mates?**

Yes. And lots of gay fans as well who I've met at shows and through social media. **I'd imagine a lot of those fans would find you attractive as well?** [Laughs] Yes, that's been said before and it's very flattering.

**Well you're a fine looking bloke. Have you ever considered modelling or acting?**

People who see a photo of me are often deranged enough to think that I'm a handsome guy. But you see, they had to take about a million photographs to get that one shot [Laughing]. I've never been interested in modelling, although I think acting could be fun.

**Who would you turn gay for?**

I think as a young man, Paul Newman was a very handsome and manly guy. I love his attitude on screen and he's such a great actor.

**Who are your biggest influences from the music world?**

The first album I fell in love with and still listen to regularly is Dionne Warwick singing the Burt Bacharach catalogue. Then there's Nancy Sinatra and that big gay icon Dusty Springfield! Dusty is one of my favourite singers of all time and I listen to her music as often as I can. So, it started off with them, then I got into singer/songwriters like Leonard Cohen, Lou Reed and Bob Dylan. I suppose I'm now sitting somewhere in between. But I'd have to say Dusty is my favourite diva.

**I believe there's some story about Kate Bush, transvestism and a bath?**

[Laughs] That was one of those stories I made up to the introduction of a song, to get people's attention when their minds were wandering. I wrote a song called *My Man*, which is the first song I wrote for the recent album and it's in the third person. It comes from the perspective of a woman who's obsessed with a man, who doesn't

recognise her. The song describes all the sweet and then the nasty things that she's going to do to get this guy's attention. But clearly coming from me, as a male, the lyrics come across as very gay. So I've had a lot of fun with that.

**Have you ever dressed up as Kate Bush?**

No. Cross dressing doesn't really interest me. But I love Kate Bush's music. She's a real talent. When I first heard *Running Up That Hill*, *Hounds Of Love* and *Wuthering Heights*, they just sent shivers up my spine. And the iconic clip of *Wuthering Heights* is just so beautiful. It's an unself-conscious expression at its best, and on top of that she's an absolutely beautiful looking woman.

**There's no doubting that ABBA were the biggest pop sensation of the '70s. Did you ever get into them?**

No. I never listened to them growing up because my parents never listened to them. But I've since discovered ABBA and I can't say a bad word about them. The production and harmonies are great. I quite like them, but they wouldn't be at the top of my list of things to put on at a party. I particularly like the way *Dancing Queen* starts. It's quite unique in the way it's structured. It starts with an instrumental chorus and kicks into the verse which is a pretty bold thing to do. And they do it well.

**Is it true that you write songs in the shower?**

Yep, absolutely. Well, I write my best songs in the shower! [Laughs] I do it in my head. Maybe it's a generational thing but the only time I have for myself is in the shower. So, it's one place I can stop and let my mind wander and I often get a good verse and a chorus and a concept for a song. Then I might step out and write it down and finish it.

**If there is one musician you could bring back from the dead to record with, who would that be?**

I want to say Lee Hazlewood who wrote a lot of songs with Nancy Sinatra, but probably David McComb from The Triffids who I'd love to write music with. He left us about 10 years ago, but I've met the rest of his band and I get along with them really well. I think I would have gotten along well with David.

**What are your thoughts on gay marriage?**

I'm shocked that it's even an issue. It's truly upsetting to think that in 2012, it has to even be discussed or queried. Human beings deserve to express their love for one another in anyway they feel they should. It's their right. Being in love is the greatest thing that human beings can experience.

**Is Alexander Gow a jocks, boxers or freeballing man?**

I originally started wearing jocks because in the wee hours of the morning when getting up to go to the toilet, I'd catch my reflection and it would crack me up. I thought it was a hilarious look and from then on I was hooked. Jocks are the most comfortable and there's a certain humour about them that makes every man look like a child.



Alexander with Oh Mercy: "I've never done Kate Bush drag." Bomshell!!!

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