

compiled and presented by **CYBER CHAMELEON**

# cyber-esque

ISSUE 18 • JULY 2014



A fanzine dedicated to the extremely awesome  
**BOY GEORGE & CULTURE CLUB**



# SNAPSHOT





Welcome to...

# cyber-esque

Issue 18 - July 2014 (covering Oct - Dec 2013)

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and more.... more.... more!

NOW FOR THE (slightly) TECHNICAL BITS... CYBER-ESQUE (Issue 18, July 2014) comes to you from Melbourne, Australia, via the Boy George / Culture Club fan-site, Cyber Chameleon ([www.cyberchameleon.com](http://www.cyberchameleon.com)) and its Facebook page ([facebook.com/cyberchameleon](https://facebook.com/cyberchameleon)). Text and images in CYBER-ESQUE have been acquired from various (mostly online) sources, and every endeavour has been made to credit the respective sites/owners, but as some information comes in second hand, there may be some oversights - misplaced/missing credits are not intentional! No copyright infringement is intended - but with that said, CYBER-ESQUE is free of charge and is not intended for profit - it's merely a tool to share information between Boy George & Culture Club fans. CYBER-ESQUE's concept and layout: Adrian Prosen, Cyber Chameleon's webmaster. Email: [cultureclubbed@gmail.com](mailto:cultureclubbed@gmail.com). Special thanks and love to all the usual suspects... you know who you are! Extra thanks to: Glenn Cunningham-Vilar, Steve Horler and Matthew Anderson. Cover image - George as illustrated by TradeMark for the This Way Out exhibition.



Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the new issue of CYBER-ESQUE! It's been a busy couple of months at Cyber Chameleon HQ. In addition to bringing the CYBER-ESQUE issues up to date, there are a few new projects that are in the planning stages, including a redesign of the website... but first things first - it's this issue of the magazine!

In this issue, you'll find lots of pictures from the "This Way Out" exhibition which George held with TradeMark as part of the Homotopia festival. Between them, George and Mark put together an exhibition of vibrant, creative and colourful imagery which was the festival's highlight.

Also, is a transcript of the excellent Talks Music TV special, where George talked about his musical influences. If you'd like this episode on DVD - drop me a line!

Until the next issue (which is coming very soon)...

Enjoy!

Adrian



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# CYBER CHAMELEON



# SUPERSTAR DJ, TWITTER-FIGHTER, 80S ICON, PHOTOGRAPHER, DESIGNER – OH, BOY GEORGE HAS GOT MORE LABELS THAN SELFRIDGES. WHILE WE'VE LOVED EVERYTHING HE'S DONE, IT'S A GENUINE PLEASURE TO SEE HIM BACK WITH A TOUR AND HIS FIRST NEW ALBUM OF ORIGINAL MATERIAL IN NEARLY TWO DECADES

It's somewhat fitting that I'm bowing down before this particular mister. Boy George is, after all, gay royalty. Albeit that I'm not taking that too literally, I'm just trying to control my excitable pug while George casts an eye over our recent Stuart Reardon adorned issue of GT.

"It's kind of ironic that straight people can be more gay than gays. I was watching the VMA's and Macklemore. When I did Same Thing In Reverse I remember having conversations with American radio stations and them saying 'Oh we can't play this, it's too gay.' It didn't even mention the word gay. It's so funny how straight people can get away with doing all the things we do. You know what I mean? If that were someone gay there would be outrage..."

We're in a central London office, George beginning the promotional trail for his new album, *This Is What I Do*. He's very beardy today, and noticeably thinner – as any recent tabloid will have noted.

But it's those tabloids that are keeping the notoriously out-spoken George a little more in check today. Once again he's enraged the fans of a certain globally-famous boy band...

"It was a bit annoying the whole thing. I was surprised how much mileage she managed to get out of a flippant comment. I have nothing against One Direction. I couldn't care less if they were gay. I mean, really? Come on! One Direction is the biggest band in the world and they want to write anything they can about them. I suppose they would've done that to me back in the day. But I was like, 'Oh my God'. I was shocked."

Although he's never really held back but this wasn't him actually saying anything...

"No, it was fun. It was off the record. It was a response to a question 'Do you think any of them are bisexual?' I was like, 'Probably, they've got to be haven't they? Everyone is a bit.' All things are bendable! No matter who they are. And the ironic thing is that there's all this thing of their fans fantasising of them having sex with each other..."

Some of the art is pretty cool, actually.

"Yeah, so shut up actually!"

It's not the first time George has engaged with 1D's somewhat full-on fanbase.

"I feel that what's said on Twitter stays on Twitter, like Vegas, you know, that's the rule. It's on Twitter so it's got nothing to do with anyone else. You're thinking out loud. It's weird the way the press stick their nose into Twitter, you know? It's a bit sad really. Get a life!"

It's not really journalism either.

"No, it's not. I don't take it seriously. There're a handful of people on there who sporadically insult me, but it doesn't bother me. Usually I say something like 'I've had a really nice breakfast' and it really confuses them. 'You fucking faggot!' 'I had a really nice breakfast!' and they're like 'what?' Better to blow them a kiss than get into a big argument. But if I've had sugar or I'm bored, I'll fight till the death!"

Talking about eating. I can't not mention how good he's looking. Is there going to be an exercise DVD?

"No, there's not! It's not just one thing. It's everything. It's partly getting sober, it's partly exercising, it's partly food. It's generally just getting into shape, exercising regularly, eating at the right times, not having too much sugar. We all know this stuff!"

George was 47 when he gave up smoking, drinking and drugs. As he puts it, he stopped being "self-destructive". Now his only vice is food. And looking at rugby players, of course. But it's not part of a master plan, and George will be the last person to use the word 'comeback'. He's remained working under the radar all this time, settling into the changes of how things are done these days. The only difference now, with the absence of a record label, is he's taking things into his own hands.

"This new album I made myself, I chose all the people to make it, I paid for it myself, I've been much more involved in the important stuff rather than the trivial stuff. I've really enjoyed it. I described the album to a friend as 'a lover I can trust'. And

plus, in terms of writing and stuff, I'm in a good place. I'm not miserable. It's not 'he broke my heart.'"

There was one song that I did think was quite sad, *It Was Easy*.

"*It Was Easy* was a song about my dad. My dad left my mum after 43 years. He's dead now, God rest his soul. But I always thought it's easy when you're the one who stops loving. When you're the one who doesn't feel like that, it's easy to walk away. It's a song about that. It's not a song about me."

And what about the tour – can we expect a greatest hits set?

"No. We're doing a lot of the new album and some carefully placed classics. I've never been the sort of person to say I'm doing my ethereal catalogue from 1934! I'm a performer and I don't want to put on a shit show. Of course, I always do *Karma* and *Do You Really Want To Hurt Me*? I don't hate my old stuff, but I don't sing the songs that I don't like. Things that seem silly I don't do. *Karma* is a pretty silly song but it's passable. It's spirited. It has something about it."

Does he find there's less creativity in music compared to when he was in Culture Club?

"There's always creativity. When I was growing up in the 1970s the pop scene was bonkers because you didn't have Simon Cowell and radio stations were grateful for pop music. Now they tell you that you're too old and it's a bit corporate. The 70s was the last decade when anything was possible. No-one was in control of anything. So you had the Goombay Dance Band, the Sex Pistols, Shakin' Stevens. In a way, this album is a tribute to the 70s. The mainstream now is so formulaic. Everyone is making the same record. You can almost tell where a song is going from the beginning."

Couldn't he work with One Direction? All the fans would have to love him then...

"They'll all love me sooner or later because they'll realise. It's like my little niece, six months ago she was all about One Direction and now she's like 'It's all a bit cringe isn't it?'"

Talk turns, as we're prone to do these days in *Gay Times*, to LGBT rights in Russia. Does he agree with boycotting the Olympics?

"I'm not sure attacking Putin is the right answer. I'm not sure boycotting vodka is the answer. It's really upsetting when you see kids in Russia beating up women, kicking

transvestites. It breaks my heart.

What can I do? Do I not go to Russia? It's such a ridiculous idea. I've gone to Russia many times and my presence hasn't corrupted anyone. Maybe one or two! But it's very worrying. And what's most worrying is young Russian kids tweeting me really homophobic comments. It's terrifying to encounter such ignorance at such a young age and you think 'oh my God, you're just children'. I think about it a lot. Should I go to Russia? Should I not go? I get offered gigs and then think I'll consult Russian activists and ask what they think..."

Our politics discussed (no really, it was more indepth, but no-one wants to read an essay), we turn to more cheery online topics. Namely George's love of Guys With iPhones.

"You know I love a pretty dick, but I prefer partly-dressed people. I think it's sexier when someone has a pant on. I like the ones where they look like they're ripping their clothes off. I like to share them with people. It breaks up the gloom. If you have a beautiful body, it's very nice to share it with us. I'd never put up pictures of me in my pants. I saw some pictures of Perez Hilton and I thought 'Oh my God, she's bold!' But it goes too far! I wouldn't do that. I say that, but maybe I will!"

Has he discovered Snapchat yet? "Snapchat is really quick, right?"

Ten seconds and then it gets destroyed.

"The rule is to not put anything on the internet that you wouldn't want your mother to see. And I think that's a very good rule."

I don't think anyone's living by that rule these days.

"I am."

You are?

"Now. I've done some things in the past..." ■

*This Is What I Do* is out now, for tour details see [boygeorgeuk.com](http://boygeorgeuk.com), @boygeorge

[gaytimes.co.uk](http://gaytimes.co.uk)







# MAD ABOUT THE BOY

WORDS DARREN SCOTT



# Lifting the mask: Boy George and Mark Wardel talk about their new exhibition



[liverpooldailypost.co.uk](http://liverpooldailypost.co.uk) / main photo: Dean Stockings

**George and Mark first met back in the late 1970s when they were both regulars on the scene at London's Blitz club**

As collaborations go, it seems so obvious – the cult club artist and the Culture Club artiste joining creative forces for the first time.

The only surprise perhaps is that it's taken Mark Wardel, aka TradeMark, and George O'Dowd – or Boy George to you and me – quite so long considering their friendship stretches back (say in quickly) 35 years.

But no matter.

There's a palpable crackle of energy and enthusiasm in the air as the duo sit ensconced in the residents' snug at the Hope Street Hotel on a whistlestop visit to the city to talk about their new joint exhibition, *This Way Out*, which opens next week as part of Homotopia.

George and Mark first met back in the late 1970s when they were both regulars on the scene at London's Blitz club.

"Mark was a painter," George recalls. "And I was very impressed. Because my dad was a painter and decorator, but Mark was an artist.

"I'd seen some pictures he'd done of other people that were really glamorous, and I was really excited about the idea of being painted by him."

And the teenage George was, Mark reveals, his first ever real subject.

"I think it was you," he says, nodding at his friend, "and then Steve Strange. I did his crotch right down to his cowboy boots."

George hoots: "Steve Strange was furious that I was painted before him!"

The pair, glamorous raconteurs, bonded over a love of Glam (in fact, they visited Tate Liverpool together earlier this year to see its *Performance of Style* exhibition), Iggy Pop, Roxy Music and, of course, the Thin White Duke, David Bowie.

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"The 70s was also a time of great greyness and poverty, you had rubbish strikes and it was quite bleak," George points out. "And yet, I suppose, when you're 15 or 16, you know, I certainly didn't pick up on that.

"It's so funny because when I see old footage of the 70s I go, 'I don't remember it being like that'. It just seemed like a time of great optimism to me, and a time of great self-discovery."

Mark agrees: "We were very lucky that we had the whole Bowie thing happening, because that really is what kick-started all the experiments with image and creating identities.

"Both George and I weren't very good at school, so our school was sort of the school of Bowie really."

"I always joke that I've got A level Bowie," George laughs, "although I'd probably need to revise a bit now. There was a point where I knew everything and was unstoppable but now I'm a bit shaky."

Mark had grown up in New Brighton and studied at Wallasey School of Art and Design before heading for the bright lights of the capital where he got a job with a Soho advertising agency. His first commission was designing packaging for Love Boost capsules.

But his "obsession" has always been with the human face and body, and portraits under his professional moniker TradeMark are often seen as images of perfection.

"Even now, Mark makes you look exactly how you think you look, rather than how you really look," explains George.

The future Boy George meanwhile "just wanted to get out of school as quickly as I could.

"And once I got out of school, I kind of meandered around looking fabulous for a few years. It wasn't really until everyone I knew had started a band, or become a designer, I was the last one and everyone was like 'what's he going to do? What are we going to do about George?'

"And then I suddenly went – I'm going to be in a band. It was just a random thing."

Mark recalls: "I can remember George used to come round and visit me at my studios in Soho, and he used to sing – this is long before Culture Club – Shirley Bassey songs and things like that. And his voice was just incredible.

"So it was kind of obvious to everybody else that that's what he would do, even if he didn't see it himself."

Their personal and professional paths have continued to cross over the years, and now three decades on the pair have been back in the studio, collaborating on this new show which forms part of the Homotopia festival's 10th birthday celebrations.

The exhibition will feature paintings, photographs, masks and installations, all based on their shared **interest in constructed identities**.

"It's going right back to when we first knew each other in the Blitz era," explains Mark.

There's a clever riff on the idea of Steve Strange/Fade to Grey masks, with George photographing a host of people wearing them, including his mum and nine-year-old nephew.

"Everything interlocks together," says Mark. "So there's figurative and literal masks. George is photographing masks and I'm painting paintings of the photographs."

"And I'm doing a bit of painting as well," George chips in. "Not painting painting, but painting on my photographs, which are canvas prints."

In addition to the month-long exhibition, George releases his new album – *This is What I Do* – on Monday, and he (and Mark) will take part in an *In Conversation* at St George's Hall.

"The whole thing we're working around is characters that are created identity," Mark says, "who have created their own identities."

George beams: "Beautiful illusions."

*This Way Out is at Camp and Furnace in Greenland Street from October 30 to November 25. Boy George is In Conversation at St George's Hall on November 14.*





"Steve Strange - One Man On A Lonely Platform"



For Freya Punk, Boy George transformed a friend's 15-year-old daughter into a geisha. The image was influenced by the cover of the 1974 album *Kimono My House* by Sparks. "All of the images are related to records and bands in the '70s and '80s and things that have stuck in my head," George said.



Boy George and TradeMark created the character NoMoney Campbell, a tongue-in-cheek answer to model Naomi Campbell. "She tweeted that she liked the picture," George said. "Mark put a picture up of his painting. Naomi's got a great sense of humour so she'd appreciate it."

## This Way Out: The New Boy George

**Popstar, rockstar, photographer, chameleon: Pete Goodbody puts aside his preconceptions and introduces himself to the new Boy George...**

It's Bonfire Night and Boy George is on Later with Jools. He's sporting a beard that's not quite Guy Fawkes, a large purple hat, mascara, and heavy gold chains around his neck. And he's rocking. Proper rock music with drums, guitars and things. This is a very long way from Karma Chameleon indeed.

This new Boy George looks confident, assured and comfortable; he tells Jools he's a clean living person now, drinking lots of water and getting back on his feet after well documented past troubles. There's a new album and he's touring it as well as DJ'ing. He's a busy guy.

The time is right then for George to show us another aspect to his creative character. An exhibition of his photographs, *This Way Out*, is currently being shown at Camp and Furnace (as part of Homotopia Festival), demonstrating that he's not too shabby at pressing a camera shutter. These are accomplished portraits of the people who do, or did, make up some of George's inner circle.

Set amongst a series of Warholesque prints and paintings by Wirral-based graphic designer and friend, Trademark, they explore preconceived notions of gender and identity. Depicted here are '80s trailblazers Adam Ant, Steve Strange (main image) and Tasty Tim; people for whom the image they project to the outside world is important, but who also don't care what others think of them. They care what they look like, but are somehow indifferent to how most of the rest of society views them; being different is a large part of their persona.

These people, from punks to New Romantics, were instrumental in shaping the cultural world we know today. The words "It's all Bowie's fault" are stenciled on the wall. That's a hefty charge, but you can see where George is coming from.

It is notable and entirely fitting that one of this country's greatest LGBT icons is part of the show. George's portrait of April Ashley (one of the first people in the world to undergo pioneering gender reassignment surgery), in which she is styled and made up to look like The Queen, is a striking one in its own right, in addition to being an obvious but effective joke. This is the first time George's photography has been exhibited in public, and it is a reminder that things were very different not so long ago, and not in a good way.

Later in the evening, after I'd seen the exhibition, I went to St George's Hall to hear Boy George talk about his work. I was looking forward to this; I'm interested in creative process and I wanted to know whether his intentions matched the message I had taken away from *This Way Out*.

On the same stage used by Charles Dickens to give readings in the 19th century, George was being interviewed by broadcaster Janice Long. That's actually quite a big deal.

"I always wanted to be in a rock band", he tells the audience, "but it didn't work out that way"

Inevitably, there was a good deal of reminiscing and talk of the '80s; a decade for which George said he had great affection, although he also declared he preferred "the now". The new album was a collection of music styles that he loved, mostly from the '70s and '80s (making sense to me of the way it's put together and the mish mash of musical styles).

"I always wanted to be in a rock band", he tells the audience, "but it didn't work out that way". Knowing what we do now, that might seem a surprising thing to hear, but with major lifestyle influences such as David Bowie, Marc Bolan, Patti Smith and Lou Reed, we start to get a clearer picture of what goes into making George tick.

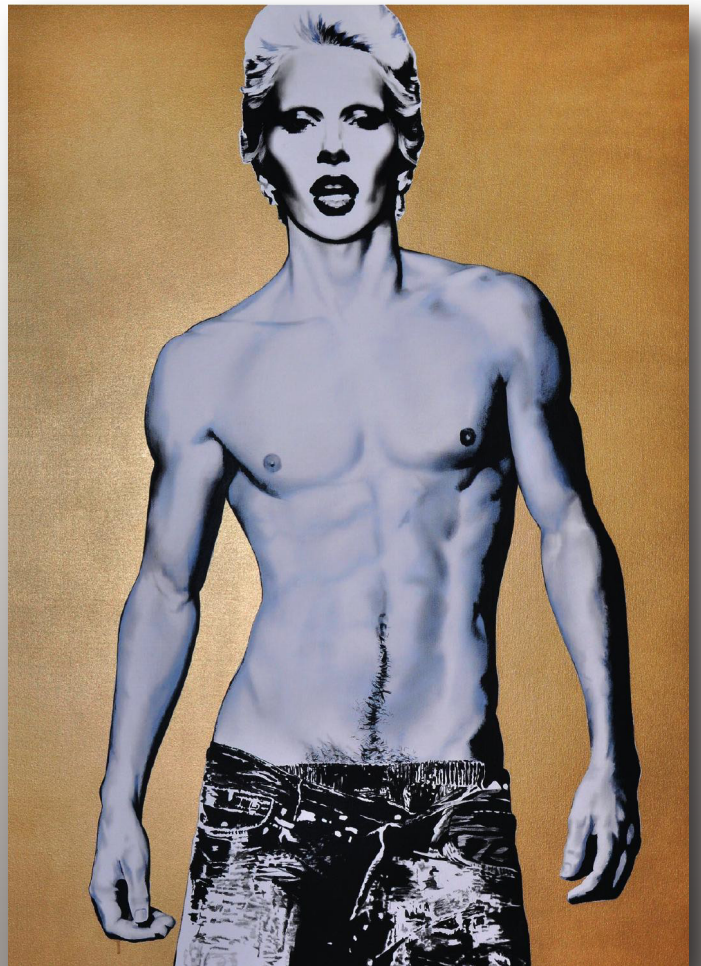
He talked about the Blitz Club and the scene that was happening around it. "A small scene of self obsessed people" he said, and they certainly didn't think about the social impact they were having at the time. But, years later, people would come up to George and thank him for what he did back then to change people and their attitudes towards the LGBT community. He gave people hope, and that made him immensely proud, albeit in retrospect. At the time, the punks and New Romantics weren't thinking of altruism; they were just being themselves and having a good time. But it's true, they did change things.

In conversation, George didn't talk a great deal about *This Way Out*, probably because he wasn't asked much about it. He told us he wasn't interested much in the reality of the photos (some of them are heavily edited), he just wanted to make people look glamorous — to show off their exaggerated personas. But the exhibition goes further than that; it's confirmation that you don't have to be normal to be accepted. And that wasn't always the case.

The Guy Fawkes beard seems even more appropriate after this evening. He tells us that lots of people have said to him they hate it. He doesn't care. For now that's his look and he's not bothered with what anyone else thinks. That is what he does.

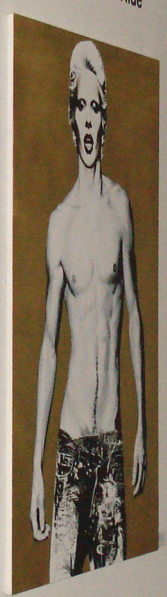
- Pete Goodbody, [thedoublenegative.co.uk](http://thedoublenegative.co.uk)





"Angie Bowie as a Boy"

"Paradoxical though it may seem, it is none the less true that life imitates art more than art imitates life."  
- Oscar Wilde



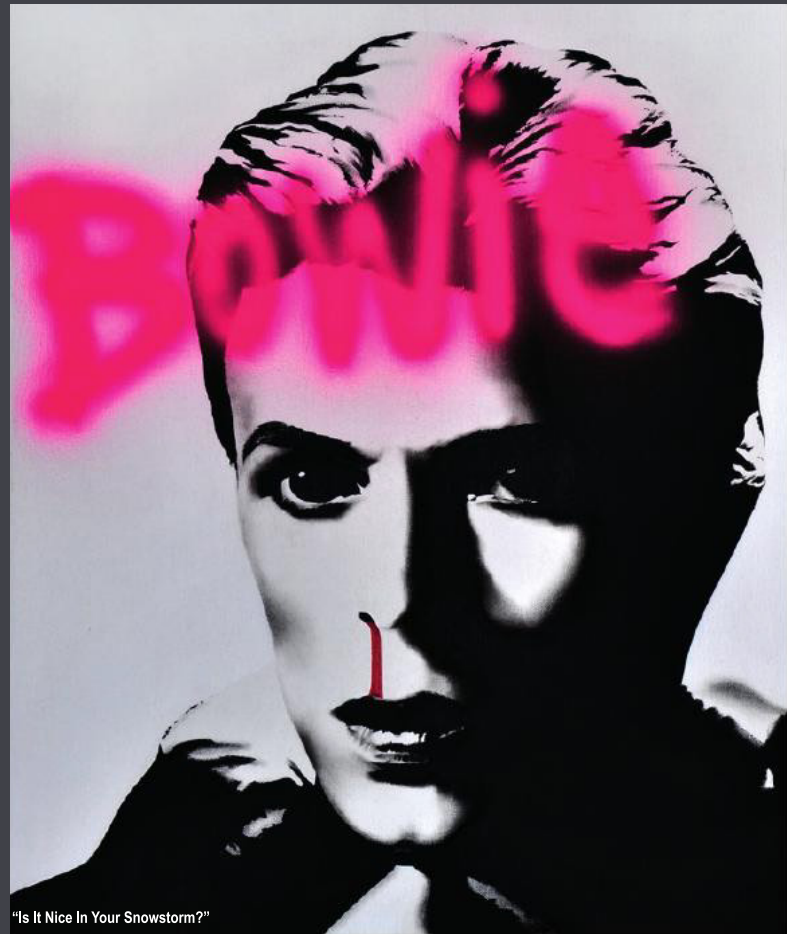








TradeMark met Boy George in the Blitz club in the late 1970s before the singer found fame with Culture Club. TradeMark now creates paintings that play with real photographs and popular icons. This painting, titled Anti-Social, is based on a photo of TradeMark himself (centre) with cross-dressing 80s pop star Marilyn (right).



"Is It Nice In Your Snowstorm?"







TradeMark painted this image of Jackie Curtis, one of Andy Warhol's "superstars", who died of a heroin overdose at the age of 38 in 1985.



Boy George took this photo of actress Sadie Frost dressed as Madonna for a Hepatitis C charity campaign. "I've been taking photos for years," George said. "I've always carried a camera with me. Originally it was just a hobby. But professionally, if you want to call it that, I've been doing it for five or six years."



Julian Clary by Boy George



The exhibition is one of the highlights of the 10th edition of the gay culture festival Homotopia. To mark the occasion, Boy George has also photographed April Ashley, one of the first people in the world to undergo gender reassignment surgery, who is the subject of her own exhibition at the Museum of Liverpool.









# BOY GEORGE & TRADEMARK

Lowdown Magazine, November 2013

*Renowned club artist TradeMark brings his collaborative exhibition with Boy George to Camp & Furnace this month as part of Homotopia Festival. Sarah O' Hara spoke to TradeMark to discover the inspiration behind it and hear his recollections of the Blitz club...*

**'This Way Out' is a collaborative exhibition by Boy George and yourself, taking part at Homotopia - could you tell us more about it?**

George and I have known each other since 1978 when we met at a club called The Blitz. After I left Art School in Wallasey, I headed down to London and gravitated towards that scene. I was blown away by the way people there looked, and people like George looked amazing! He was the first real live person I did a painting of and we've been friends since then. We've worked together over the years on various projects, record covers and such, but this exhibition explores invented identities, constructed identities of imaginary characters and people who have created an alternative identity. It sort of follows on from the Bowie influence. George has been taking photos for a few years now and we share a similar aesthetic sense, so we work together very well.

**Speaking of creating identities, was this inspired by clubs like The Blitz?**

Well people at The Blitz, who were labelled 'new romantics' even though we hated the label, took the lead and called themselves whatever they wanted and looked however they wanted. I've always based my art around all these amazing people with exaggerated personas and identities.

**Some of the amazing people painted and photographed for this event include Lou Reed, Iggy Pop and Steve Strange. Did you get to know Steve through George and The Blitz club?**

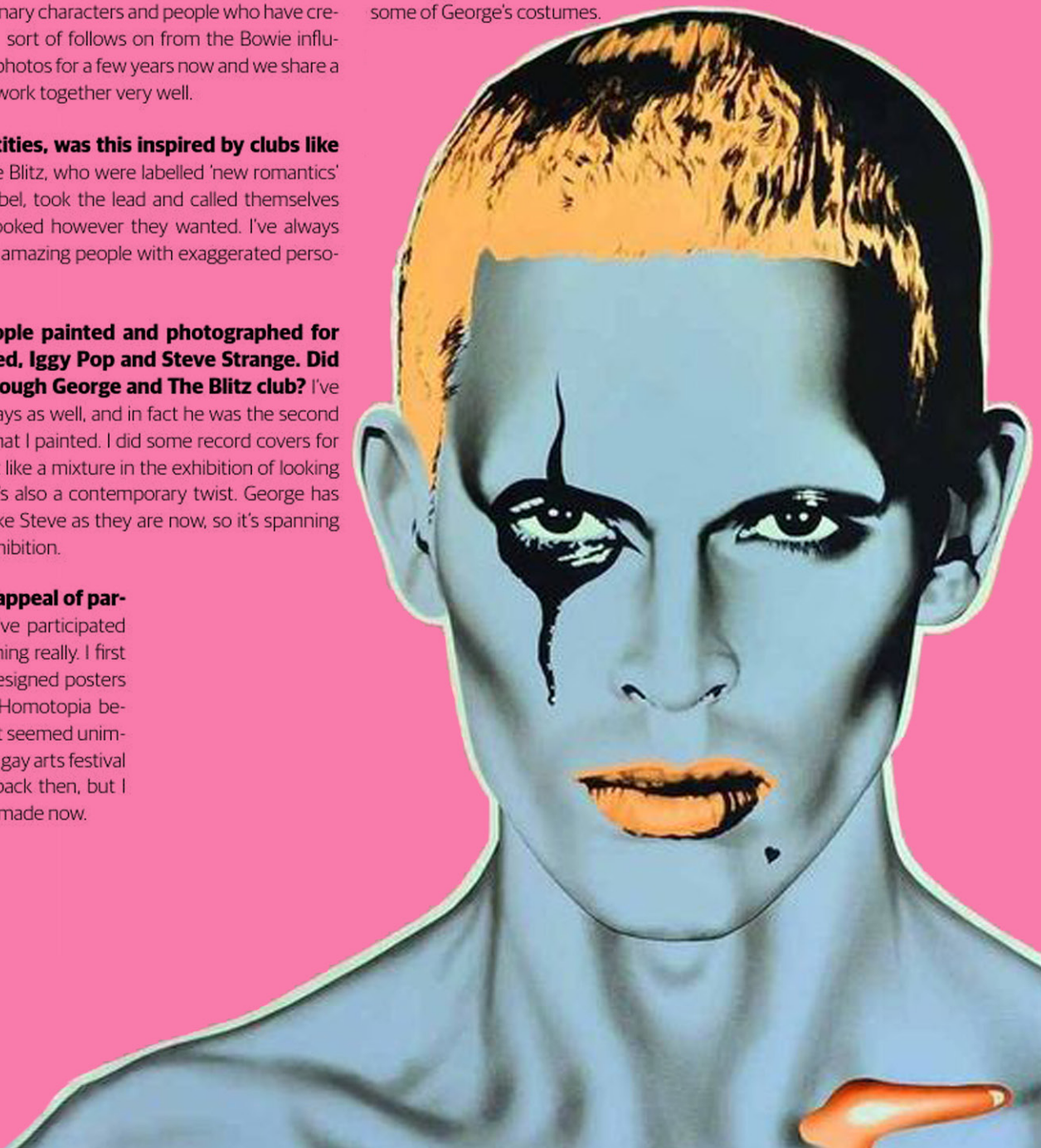
I've known Steve since the Blitz days as well, and in fact he was the second person in 1978 after George that I painted. I did some record covers for him and Visage too. It's almost like a mixture in the exhibition of looking back at those days, but there's also a contemporary twist. George has been photographing people like Steve as they are now, so it's spanning an entire time period in the exhibition.

**As an artist, what was the appeal of participating in Homotopia?**

I've participated at Homotopia since the beginning really. I first exhibited at the festival and designed posters for them. I loved the idea of Homotopia because when I was growing up it seemed unimaginable that you would have a gay arts festival as society was very different back then, but I love the progress that is being made now.

**After Homotopia what are your plans for the future?**

I'm carrying on with my painting and I'm hoping to exhibit in London and the States. Tying in with what we're doing in this exhibition, I'm hoping to write a book - not an autobiographical one, but more of an anecdotal piece featuring the club scenes. If this show goes well at Homotopia we may do an expanded version in 2015. One of the things that inspired us was the Glam exhibition at TATE Liverpool earlier in the year, which was brilliant. We don't have a lot of articles on display in our exhibition, mainly photographs and paintings, but if we were to expand the exhibition we may include some of George's costumes.





# An audience with Boy George

## Hundreds flock to St George's Hall

*In a candid interview George spoke about his earliest musical influences*

Hundreds of people flocked to St George's Hall to hear pop legend Boy George in conversation with Liverpool broadcaster Janice Long.

Last night's Homotopia event – which focused on an exhibition of art work entitled This Way Out by Boy George and New-Brighton-raised artist Mark Wardel, aka TradeMark – attracted around 350 fans.

The pair, who became friends while clubbing at London's legendary Blitz club in the 1970s, collaborated together on the exhibition in a pop-up gallery within Camp and Furnace on Greenland Street, Liverpool.

Boy George's photography was blended with TradeMark's Pop Art Punk painting style to create what the singer called "some beautiful and striking images", celebrating "alternative ideas of beauty, exhibitionism and the music and musicians who shaped our lives."

George said: "I have liked a lot of his [TradeMark's] work and he had done sleeves for me. He is part of my life. We don't talk everyday, but we keep in touch with each other.

"I've known him since the late 70s when he first painted me and made me feel legendary. I've collected his work for many years and was very excited to collaborate with him for Homotopia."

In a candid interview – also witnessed by former Frankie Goes to Hollywood singer Holly Johnson – George spoke about his earliest musical influences.

He said: "They were David Bowie, Lou Reed, T.Rex. I loved reggae, punk, electro, jazz. All these inspired me... When I was a kid I loved music. My first record was Alexander Beetle by Melanie. I had Yellow River by Christie."

He also revealed that he will soon get back with Culture Club, adding: "We have been talking about it for three years. I want to do a record with them and I'll start writing with them in January. It won't be a funk record. I don't know what we want to do."

During the conversation, he also took questions from the audience and reflected on his time in prison and being clean of drugs.

He said: "Being in the public eye, it's not helpful if you have a problem and it's splashed all over the papers. You hope that people forget about it, but you want to get on with your life. People are very supportive."

Asked about how long he had been clean from his former drugs addiction, he said: "Almost six years clean now. I have done the tour and wore the T-shirt. Being sober is the most amazing thing."

On his time in prison, he said: "I worked in the kitchen for about three months. It's like a microcosm of what it's like out here. But there are lots of people crammed up together."

He also revealed that he anonymously donates some of his clothes to charity shops and he gets a thrill when he sees someone in his former clothes.

He said: "I give clothes to charity. I've seen people in my clothes and I've said 'That's my jacket'. But people don't know that it's my stuff."

When quizzed if there was anything that he would want to do in his life, he said: "I would like to jump out of an aeroplane, but that will never happen. I have tried acting. It's very hard work. I'm open to anything. I'm not interested in pot-holing or going to the jungle."

- [liverpoolecho.co.uk](http://liverpoolecho.co.uk)



George with Janice Long







Courtesy of Homotopia's YouTube channel, you can watch George and Mark's Conversation at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1f3aJDR4UyY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1f3aJDR4UyY)



# Talks Music

Talks Music is a TV show which takes an in depth look at key artists who have shaped modern music and shows them in a previously unseen light. This is the transcript for the episode featuring George, interviewed by Matthew Gerrie.

Hello and welcome to Talks Music. In the 80s when British pop bands ruled the world, one star shined brighter than the rest. Gifted with a wonderful voice, once described as a "recycled Smokey Robinson", his deeply personal songs have broken many a heart - including his own. But his talent has sometimes been eclipsed by the controversy surrounding the man rather than the artist. Behind the often eyebrow-lifting headlines is a hugely talented singer, a multi award-winning songwriter. He's had a Tony Award nomination and won two Brit awards and a Grammy. In America, his band Culture Club was the first group since the Beatles to achieve three Top 10 singles from their debut album, and in Australia, his face on the cover of a magazine sold more than Princess Diana's. Back at home in the UK, he was the other Queen of England, and he's sold over 20 million albums worldwide. Ladies and Gentlemen, Boy George!

**Hello. How are you doing?**

Good to see you.

**Welcome to Talks Music.**

Thank you.

**You look amazing.**

You can learn a lot about yourself from an introduction!

**I'm going to take you right back, right back to the very beginning.**

Do you have to? (laughs)



**Yeah, sorry! You were born in south-east London. Give us a little background of family life in the O'Dowd household.**

Well, I would describe my mother as a goddess in a tank - she's a strong, Irish woman who is still going strong now at 74, she's an amazing woman. If you see old photos of my Mum in the 50s, she really had it going on in terms of fashion. My dad was really, he couldn't stand dressing up or being glamorous, so in a way I think she liked the fact that I was doing what I was doing because it was what she couldn't do. My dad has passed away - about 8 years ago - my dad was a very handsome, strong-willed, jealous Irishman. When I came out, he was amazing - surprisingly, he was amazing.

**cyber-esque • page 16**

**Supportive?**

Yeah, he said "you're still my son" and it didn't seem to bother him. He might have had an idea! (laughs) Growing up I was gay, but still he was a very creative person, he had a great voice.

**And supportive later in terms of your career, George?**

Yeah - always. Most parents would be horrified if you said you'd be in a band, but mine were kind of relieved because it was like - all my other brothers worked and I was the only one who wasn't working. I kind of did odd jobs and I worked in shops and did window dressing and signed on and went to clubs. I'd come home with these photo albums of magazine covers and they were like "what do you do? Why do people want to take your picture" and I'd say "because I'm fabulous!" (laughs)



**What about music in the household generally? Was there a lot of music?**

From my older brother Richard, I got a lot of music. I used to hear things coming out of his bedroom and that's really where I first discovered Bowie. I think that the song "Width of a Circle" was the beginning of my love affair with Bowie because that was like "wow, what's this song about? 'He swallowed his pride and puckered his lips / And showed me the leather belt 'round his hips' and I was like - hmmm, this is sort of exotic!" And pop music at the time was very different to that. Bowie was kind of painting a very unusual landscape and using words that you didn't hear in pop songs.

**You said that the music was quite different then when David came along.**

You had really poppy things like Yellow River by Christie - I loved all of it. At that point in my life, there was no discretion. The first record I officially bought was Alexander Beete by Melanie, which is really a novelty record but I loved it. Bowie was another level, really. The Man Who Sold The World, then Hunky Dory - I saw Bowie when I was 11.

**You said "Bowie was like an alien. It was the most exciting thing I'd ever seen - no concert I've seen since has had the same effect"**

It was amazing. It was a life changing experience. I've never really been able to enjoy a gig since because it wasn't Bowie. Once you saw Bowie at 11, everything else seemed to pale in

significance really. I remember my grandmother really didn't want me to go, she thought it was really going to be bad for me to see this "big poof" (audience laughs) and my dad and my grandmother never really got along, so my dad bought me the ticket to annoy her - and that's how I went.

**And famously, you went to meet him I think at Victoria Station when he came back from Berlin.**

Yeah. Well I used to go and sit outside his house in Beckenham...

**A real fan.**

Oh yeah, proper - and obviously when he came back from Berlin I was at Victoria and then we all ran off to Capital Radio when he was doing an interview and screamed, and ran after the car... (laughs)

**I heard a rumour that at one of these expeditions when you were hanging outside of his house that Angie...**

Angie, his wife shouted from the windows "I wish you'd all just fuck off!" and we were just like "oh my God (beaming), she told us to fuck off!". When I met Bowie in about 2005, he made me tell that story to Iman, and he said "that's one of the best things she said!" (laughs)

**And what about sexuality in those early days, George? Did you have an inkling that things were a little different?**

No. I think that, from about the age of 6, I was called names. You don't know what you are at 6 - you just know that you like girls, and jewellery and certain pop bands - and you don't like climbing trees and playing war, and that's all you know. Other kids have a nerving habit of reminding you that you're odd and that you don't fit in. Because I grew up with that, and then I got a lot of abuse at school...

**You got suspended.**

Well, I got expelled eventually after a lot of trying.

**At what, fifteen?**

I was fifteen when I got thrown out, yeah. I didn't go to school for about a year, and they sent letters to my parents to say that I wasn't there. My mum took me back to school, and they said "if he doesn't come to school, we're going to kick him out." and my mum asked me in front of the headmaster "are you going to come back?" and I was like "no".

**So you really got into clubbing pretty early on? Fifteen years old...**

Oh yeah, but it became trendy for blokes to wear eyeliner in the 70s, that was my cue. I thought "I'd put a bit of this on" and I actually managed to get into the club.

**And the punk thing was happening then. What was that like?**

People wore bin liners to the club and I remember dummies in their ears and pins - so that was the beginning of the punk look, and people used to think we were students. People would think that you were doing student rag week - they couldn't work out why you were in your pyjamas with holes in them! I remember there was a point when it went into the newspapers when suddenly it was given a name - that we were punks.



**Cause we're talking about 1976...**

75-76. I met Philip Sallon when I was 15, in 1976.

**Wow. Can you just explain who he was and the effect that he had on you.**

Who he is. He's still very much at large. I had a girlfriend called Laura, and we'd gone to the Lyceum to a soul night, and we were wearing punky stuff - we had holes in our clothes. And the punk thing had just hit the media, so everyone started getting a bit nervous about having rowdy punks in clubs. So we got turned away from the Lyceum, and we were stranded outside the Lyceum, thinking "what are we going to do? Our lives were over" and this very camp man saw our predicament and said "oh, come to Bangs! It's a club at the top of the road, it's five minutes away..." and we went with him to Bangs. I'd never been in a gay club before, but I was very excited once I realised it was a gay club (laughs). And Philip was in there, dancing on a podium, and he was wearing like a skirt, I think, and he had black horns and makeup on with leather gloves, and an Egyptian collar on - and we were totally mesmerised by that. "Oh my god, that's my new best friend! We've gotta make friends with him". So we followed him around the whole night.

**What was the age difference between the pair of you?**

Philip's ten years older than me.

**So he really was kind of a bit of a mentor.**

Oh my God, yeah - he's a very, very important part of my life and always sort of think of him as the first real eccentric



that I've ever met. But he's really eccentric in the true sense of the word to this day, I just don't think there's anyone like Philip on the planet. I try to explain to people what he's like and it's just impossible.



**And about this time, we're getting onto 1980...**  
**Rusty Egan and Steve Strange started the Blitz club, an extraordinary scene, much talked about since. Tell us a little bit about it.**

It was only a handful of people really, it was supposed to be really decadent - and it was the time of Kraftwerk, and all of that beginning... electro music, but we managed to get a lot of publicity, like St Martin's art students, fashion people, people like Steven Jones... Spandau Ballet - the sort of early unformed version of Spandau Ballet. If you didn't get in, it was just the worst thing ever!

**Going on to 1981 and moving ahead here - to Bow Wow Wow...**

Well, Malcolm McLaren had the Sex Pistols and he formed Bow Wow Wow. Annabella Lwin, who was he trying to make into a popstar - and anyone who's tried to work with a 14 year old will know how difficult that is. So what happened was I was friendly with the guitarist, and I was full-on drag queen, and Malcolm decided to get me into Bow Wow Wow to upset Annabella - it was like "let's get this bloke in make up to come in and threaten her position and maybe she'll back up her ideas" So I was in Bow Wow Wow for about three weeks, but Malcolm really didn't get it, he just couldn't see anything working with me. Malcolm called me a Vauxhall Tavern drag queen, which really annoyed me. And I held it against him for years. But of course, when I got famous, Malcolm would tell everyone about how he discovered me. But at the time, I was excited to be working with Malcolm and I watched him write songs and he was amazing.

**He was an extraordinary character.**

The first time I ever worked with him, we went to Bayswater to his flat and I think at the time, Vivienne Westwood thought he was having an affair with Annabella, so she'd thrown a brick through his window before we arrived! (laughs). And the people from the nearby Turkish restaurant were saying "some crazy woman in her pirate hat - she throw brick!" (laughs) and it was so exciting - "oh my god, my life is so glamorous!" (laughs)

**Looking back on it now, would you say genius,**





### **svengali or bastard - or all three?**

I think all three. I mean, when Malcolm passed away, I really cried - I really was upset. He was such a big part of my life, and I used to go around telling everyone he was managing me even when he wasn't, he was just so cool. But he made the world more exciting, I think.

**Around this time, you met someone else who was going to be very instrumental in your life... and that was Jon Moss.**

I thought you were going to say Kirk Brandon! (laughs)

**We're coming onto Kirk, but let's talk about Jon.**

He had great hair.



**He had great hair? He did, didn't he?**

I was on the King's Road with Kirk, and I'd been talking about starting a band. And I remember Kirk saying, "oh that's Jon Moss from..." I think he was in The Damned briefly. I mean, he was pretty gorgeous and I was like "hmmm... he could be my new drummer" and I remember his name and somehow or another, I got his phone number. And I rang him up and he must have thought I was insane. "I've got this band, and we're not very good. We haven't really rehearsed or anything, but we need a drummer. Do you want to be in the band?" and that was the beginning of obviously a very interesting journey.



**And that band you're talking about - how did that first come about, George?**

We'd had a couple of guitarists that didn't work out. And Mikey - Mikey was the first member. Mikey played bass. He'd seen a picture of me in NME saying I had been fired from Bow Wow Wow and thought I looked interesting, so he came to see me at the club.



**Great bass guitarist.**

Brilliant. So he said "can you sing?" and I was like "yeah, I think so!" He said "well, I play bass..." so I thought, "it's starting! I've got a bit of a band together!" And then we found Jon, and then Roy was the last person to be auditioned... and we only really took Roy 'cause he had great hair!

**Right...**

It was like that. Everyone was really shallow - it wasn't about who was a good musician, it was like they had to look right.

**And about this time was when I first met you, 'cause you made the long, long journey up to Newcastle for your first ever television debut.**

(laughs) I know!

**We had been commissioned by Channel 4 to do a new music show called The Tube, and we did auditions all around the UK for presenters.**

I remember - it was the first ever time I was on a plane and it was very exciting flying up to Newcastle (laughs) and being really freaked out.

**George absolutely blew our socks off.**

So how come I didn't get the job then? (laughs)

**Here's the thing - the only thing that might have affected our decision was that you were going to see EMI, I think it was and we decided that we wanted you to do the show, but then of course you got the record deal...**

Oh...

**and the powers that be at Channel 4 couldn't reconcile that. You would have been Jools!**

Oh my God!



**Did EMI go with the demos?**

No, they didn't get me at all, because at that time because I was full-on drag, with the long hair and a lot of make-up. It was very Siouxsie - I was obsessed with Siouxsie and I had thick eyeliner...

**Siouxsie & The Banshees?**

Siouxsie & The Banshees, yeah.

**But you also did some demos for Virgin.**

Yes. There was a man called Danny Goodwin. He was the person who really championed us, and sort of convinced EMI Publishing to give us a publishing deal, but we couldn't get a record deal.

**Despite the knock backs, did you still believe in yourselves? Did you think you could do it?**

Oh no, I was a pessimist! I was the one saying "I'm giving up" and Jon would say "Oh, for God's sake, it's only been three weeks!" Typical singer, you know. I was like - frontman, drama... So if things didn't go our way I wanted out, I was always leaving.

**So you did two singles on the back of this deal.**

Yeah

**None of them really worked out.**

I remember going to the Camden Palace and watching the DJ play our second single and watch people dance to it - it was very exciting. So to us, or to me, it felt like the biggest thing in the world that people had bought our record but the record company was like "disaster!"

**So you were about to throw the towel in?**

Totally, yeah totally. And we wrote Do You Really Want To Hurt Me and I didn't want that to come out as a single. You couldn't dance to it, you couldn't play it in a club... who's going to like that? It's really personal, it's really slow... I liked the song but I didn't see it as a single. So when Virgin said they were going to put it out, I stormed in there and I was like "I can't believe you're going to ruin our careers before they start!" (laughs) and I remember saying "I'm going to leave the band if they put this out..."

**(laughs) Again?**

Yes, again. And I was so wrong. So actually, from that point I realised that vulnerability was the key in reaching other people. So it made me really think

about what I was writing.

**I remember what struck me at the time was the whole blurring. There was the image that blurred the boundaries, but the music as well. It was a multicultural bath, wasn't it?**

I was into all sorts of kinds of music then. I loved reggae, from the 70s so Mikey's influence being Jamaican - that kind of really changed what we were doing.

**That wonderful bass riff... and soulful.**

Absolutely. And then with Roy being a bit of a soul freak, and Jon being ex-punk, into rock - that made "oh we're the Culture Club - there's a Jamaican, there's a Jewish guy, there's me, there's Roy really very Anglo-Saxon, and there's an Irish drag queen!" so it all kind of made sense.

**Something for everyone.**

Yeah, kind of.

**And the single goes to No. 1, and not just in the UK.**

All over Europe...

**About 23 countries... number one.**

Yeah. It was mad. I remember when we first went to America to play - they put the record out in a white sleeve, because I think they thought America's not ready for this. So we went to this gig for a radio station in Long Island and when we came out on stage, people gasped, because they heard this really sweet record and suddenly it was like me!

**And the fan base you had then, it was interesting I think because you were housewives' favourite and...**

Little girls! It was amazing, we did a gig Gloucestershire and I remember we came on stage, and up until that point all our fans were freaks. It was the freaks, goths, and weirdos, and drag queens - people in Vivienne Westwood clothes. We came on stage and it was full of screaming girls dressed up as me and I remember going "Oh my God" I remember looking at Jon and saying "this is bonkers!" and that's how it was for the next 6 years.

**And you talk about Jon. You were an item then, you and him, and in love?**

Hmmm... I'm not sure if we were in love. I discovered as an older man that love isn't frenzy, it's something a little more mundane than that.

**And that was pretty frenzied.**

My parents' relationship was very volatile, so I grew up believing that if someone threw a vase it meant that they cared - that kind of volatility rubbed off on me and when I grew up, a lot of relationships were like that. Now, I think love takes years to develop and I think intimacy takes years to develop. I just look back and think "nah, that wasn't love - that was just drama".

**The emotions in the songs - George. Looking back on them now, do you still connect with how you were feeling at the time?**

Yes and no. I think a lot of those early





songs were very "oh, woe is me" and they were self-pitiful. It was very "what have you done to me? You've broken my heart". I mean this, they're great songs and they have a special place in my life - but do they speak about who I am now? No, not at all. I don't ever feel like that now. I don't feel like a victim. I think particularly "Victims", when I sing it now it's a whole different thing - it's from a deeper place. My voice is deeper and I think I sing it better now anyway. It doesn't mean the same thing that it did. **You mentioned New York before and I think it was at one of the first gigs, if not the first gig you play in the Big Apple, and your opening line to the audience was "Are there any queers in the audience?" (laughs) which at that time would have gone down like an atomic bomb.**

There was a very famous incident when I got my Grammy when I said "thank you America, you know a good drag queen when you see one" and that struck a chord with every drag queen and transsexual in the world. Now, looking back, I'm really glad that I said it, but it didn't help my career in any way (laughs).



**I remember talking to Freddie Mercury about Queen going to the US, and they had problems because of the image over there and it took a while to actually get back because of the way he was portrayed in the videos etc. What made you different, do you think?**

I don't know - probably because of all those people, I think. People like Bowie

and Freddie Mercury, and everybody that tried before. I always think of myself of being a part of a daisy chain of people who have affected change right back to Oscar Wilde, Quentin Crisp, Divine... the list is still vast and there's so many people that are responsible for making the world an easier place for me, or for whoever comes next. Everything's about timing.

**America really embraced you. Three top ten singles from that debut album, in the US. You were 22 years of age.**

I was barely older than Justin Bieber! (laughs) When you're that age you think you know everything and you think you're really worldly and I obviously wasn't.



**And then, when we talk about you touring, The Tube was on air - we decided to shoot a film of you on your tour of Japan.**

One of the funniest things on that trip was that I decided I'd wear a wedding dress on stage, but didn't tell the band. There was a period when they wanted to be taken more seriously and of course, I scampered it by wearing... like that's going to make a difference. But they really were annoyed that I turned up on stage in this wedding dress - before Madonna! Initially, when it first happened, it was amazing. I remember landing in Australia and having thousands of people trying to pull my hair out, and trying to turn the bus over and it was mental! And you just think... you know "you're just George from

Eltham!", come on!

**You actually said - I have a quote "I began to realise that when you play the publicity game, you don't get a day off"...**

No.

**I mean, you've seen with people like Amy Winehouse, I guess. How do you feel now, having been through that and come out of it - what's your feeling when you see younger artists, someone like Amy, going through that process with the paparazzi camped outside their houses 7-24?**

Well, she was an incredible artist. One in a million, really. That what was magical about her, there's so many people - when they heard her sing, it just touched something inside them.

**Did you feel that you wanted to reach out and try and do something?**

Having been there and knowing how awful I was at that point when I was on drugs, there's nothing you can do and you could only pray that the person - cause the only person that can stop you is you - because that's what it's about, she didn't want to be here. She preferred to be where she was - high, and that's so sad.

**Smash Hits in 1982 reviewed a Culture Club gig and Heaven and the journalist at the time...**

Neil Tennant. (smiles)

**Neil Tennant from the Pet Shop**



**Boys, before he was in the Pet Shop Boys, said "lead singer Boy George has studied at the David Sylvian school of vocalising". What did he mean by that.**

Bizarre. I remember at the time thinking "what is he on about?" So we tried to find him to beat him up (laughs). We were at the Best Disco In Town and we saw him - me and Mikey - and said "let's go have a word with him", it was very funny. But then we made a record many years later - The Crying Game - which is one of my favourite records that I ever did, and in fact working with Neil and Chris was such an experience because I, sorry to say this, didn't realise that Neil did anything! I mean, he's a journalist, he's become a pop star... I didn't realise what a talented guy he was. So I went in the studio and Neil sat down and started transposing the song on the piano. So I really had egg on my face "oh my god, he's actually a musician!" (laughs) "he's actually more of a musician than I am" especially the way they worked me vocally - I was there for hours. Because I didn't know them, I was really well behaved, if I knew them I wouldn't have stayed there all day - I wanted to please them and I was really happy with what we did.

**And because of all of that hard work paid huge dividends, it was a massive record in the US.**

In America, yeah. One of my many renaissances.

**A great look.**

I've still got that wig, actually! (laughs)

**It was a wig? I'm so naive. George you've been blessed - it's been described as a "blue-eyed soul" voice and I'm really curious to know who your vocal heroes are. Who do you aspire to?**

The biggest influence as a teenager was Bowie, jazz - obviously, lots of jazz singers like Pearl Bailey and Diana Washington... but I like really odd voices. I'm a big Nico fan, I love Marlene Dietrich. I like amazing singers, obviously - like Aretha and people like that - and anyone with big voices, but to me some of the best singers are ones who know how to tell a story. Joni Mitchell is as a songwriter, is the most poetic. Makes you want to retire when you read her stuff. People who have their own take on emotions - and that's



kind of what I aspire to. I don't always get it right. Certainly, nowadays, my writing has changed a lot. The stuff that I used to write was really ambiguous and I think they're less so now. I'm much more direct now.

**And the inevitable question coming off the back of that is who is there, out there now, that if you could wave a magic wand, you'd kill to sing with?**

I've always been a massive fan of Morrissey, I think he's brilliant. What a great songwriter...

**Would you like to sing with him?**

But he'd never sing with me! (laughs) He'd never sing with me! Would I? Of course I would.



**One of the new things I've done is to branch out into writing a show for the stage, which was Taboo. Can you tell us about how Taboo came about.**

Taboo was a collaboration with a director called Chris Renshaw, who approached me and said "I want to do a play or a musical about your book and also incorporate the life of Leigh Bowery."



**We should say, just who Leigh was.**

(lifting up right sleeve to show the tattoo on his right arm) He's there (smiles). He made it onto my arm. Leigh was a performance artist from Australia, who came to London and became this living art installation and freak about town. He was very talented, a designer and I decided to incorporate Leigh and all the people who shaped my existence - people like Steve Strange, Marilyn, Philip...

**A lot of those brilliant characters from the Blitz days.**

Yeah, all of those people who were really a part of my growing up.

**Were you surprised at its success? Not only did it run for over a year here, but it also went to Broadway.**

It went to Broadway and lasted three months, but it was a glorious three

months! (laughs)

**The discipline of writing for the stage - for a musical. How different was it to writing with Culture Club?**

Not really that different, except I was writing about people that I really loved and people that really interested me like Philip Sallon. I wrote this song called "Ode to Attention Seekers" and this other song called "Gimme A Freak" which just really, if you know Philip, it really sums him up. "Gimme a freak, any day of the week, I'm comfortable with those you call demented" It's just - it's just Philip. I did a song about Leigh Bowery called "Ich Bin Kunst" which means "I am art", which Leigh definitely was. That's like going back to Cabaret - the whole show was so influenced by Cabaret and all of that Fiddler On The Roof, all of that stuff came into Taboo.

**When you were recording this new album George, did you find that your voice had changed?**

My voice has changed in the last two years because I gave up smoking. It was one of the best things I ever did. Perhaps when I was younger I sort of just took it for granted, and two years ago when I was struggling to give up cigarettes, my friend John said "you're destroying the very thing that makes you a living - you're crazy" so that's why I stopped, that was a good bit of advice. "Are you mad?" I was like "you know what, you're right". You need to breathe when you sing - it's very important. (laughs)

**What about the other stuff?**

I'm five years sober. I'm very proud of that. When I look at that person... god knows how I did it. Maybe it was better at that point to not understand what I was doing. What happened to me in the last five years that I decided to be Boy George properly and show him some respect. And I do now sort of think of being Boy George as my job. It might sound a bit psychotic and third-person, but I have a life that isn't about being Boy George. I have a mundane life which gives me a lot of pleasure. I have a wonderful family, great friends, and whether it's DJing or performing or making music - having a separation from those things gives them value to me, and makes them more special.

**On the new album, are you writing with anyone? Have you written with anyone?**

Yeah. I've had the same band - pretty much the same group of people since leaving Culture Club. A guitarist called John Themis, another guitarist / bass player called Kevan Frost, the producer is my old drummer Richie Stevens. I worked with Youth from Killing Joke, Mikey Craig from Culture Club has written a couple of songs with me on the new album.

**Describe if you will, the actual process of writing songs.**

I don't play anything, so "officially" I'm

not actually a musician. (laughs)

**Do you read music?**

I don't read music, no.

**So describe the process.**

The process usually with me starts with a story. Songwriting has a way of sometimes saying things to those people, sometimes answering questions to yourself, and the way that you write really changes depending on where you are in your life. What do I want to tell people? Because there isn't a boyfriend that's hurt me, I don't have any heartache, and that's always been my fuel - so it's a challenging time for me, so I'm really writing some ethereal stuff. And I do a Yoko Ono cover "Death of Samantha", I've covered that. She's a great writer. I've and a lot of reggae stuff but a bit of Bolan has gone in there... this album really is where I'm wearing my influences very very brazenly on my sleeve. I always go back to the things that I loved when I was growing up.

**And talking about real life - One of the things you turned to during and after the period of the drug hell period was religion. You describe yourself as "I'm Catholic in my complications, Buddhist in my aspirations".**

When I told my mum I was a Buddhist, she said "You're a Catholic, and that's the end of it". She still won't have it. I'm actually an SGI Buddhist now, and I practice that.

**What's an SGI Buddhist?**

SGI Buddhism is about being happy now. Not next week, or when you die. It's like about joy, now.

**At this point in the program, we've got a lot of music students here in the audience, and who are burning to ask you some questions.**

**When you look back at your career, can you define a ratio between being an artist and a businessman?**

I don't think I'm a bread head, and I'm not obsessed with how much I'm making, or anything like that. But I want to do the right thing, and I want to be the best I can be. And I certainly didn't think like that 20 years ago. When I first started, I wanted to change the world... People weren't going to be so uptight, and people weren't going to be so homophobic and racist and whatever they are. And I still kinda have that naive kind of feeling now, probably more than ever - I just feel like there's work to be done. There really is - there's still a lot of places in the world where people can't be who they want to be.

**I wondered, the use of drugs and the absence of them - how has that influenced your music over the years?**

Oh god, there was a point in my life where, even when I wasn't doing drugs a lot of the time, I accepted that they would always be a part of my life, and

I've made the decision now that they're not going to be a part of my life. At all. And that they don't benefit me in any way. I would say that I am not only a much better person, I'm a much better artist, I'm a much better DJ, I'm a much better cook! (laughs) - I'm a much better everything.

**Love?**

Er, yeah! At least I turn up now! (laughs) I'm not telling anybody what to do, but I would say learn from my example. I took it to the ultimate conclusion - bar one - the next thing is that I wouldn't be here. I have a whole different kind of attitude to my life and to my work. I'm very grateful for what I have.

**Does your Buddhism practice reach you like nothing else could?**

The best way to explain it is - sitting in a corner being hateful will have an effect. If you sit there with fists screwed up and your face screwed up and hate in the world, which we all do at some point, it will affect you. Having spent my life being really cynical, to be joyful is a new experience, but I think it is something to make happen.

**George, we're coming towards the end of the show but we have another feature called "Single File", where I'm going to ask you a single question, and you've got to try to answer it with one sentence.**

**Single biggest missed opportunity?**

Live Aid. I didn't turn up. The band were furious! Yeah...

**Single biggest mistake of your life?**

Leggings. (laughs)

**Single biggest achievement?**

Maintaining my sense of humour.

**Single most embarrassing moment?**

Pretty much all of 2005.

**The whole year?**

The whole year - it was my annus horribilus or whatever it's called.

**Single most romantic moment?**

I think discovering love isn't drama. Love is kind of ordinary - and that's a great thing to find out.

**Single favourite artist of all time?**

Grayson Perry! Oh, you mean artist/artist? I love Grayson Perry - you mean musician? I would say obviously, Bowie.

**Single favourite album of all time?**

That's impossible. Hunky Dory.

**And finally - your single ambition yet to achieve, George.**

There isn't a one-word answer to this. I've been sober for five years and prior to that, I've done some stupid things and I've made some real mistakes, and I've really distracted people from what it is that I do. So I think my single greatest ambition is to remind people of actually what I do. This is what I do.

**Boy George, thank you for coming here today to talk.**





# #AskBoyGeorge

To launch "This Is What I Do", George conducted a Twitter Q & A on October 29... here are the results!

*Hello fellow tweeters! For the next 45 mins i'll be sat here answering some of your questions. Let's go!*

**@Lucyfromtheskyy:** If you could say anything to your 18-year-old self what would it be?  
You think leggings work?

**@psycho\_jello:** Can you start a food blog or release a cookbook?  
I have considered it. But for now - food tweets!

**@lts\_Lady\_V:** What has been the strangest day of your life so far?  
Today! I've just got off a 9 hour flight from L.A

**@vickster32:** Which is your favourite culture club track?  
It's yet to be written :-)

**@msaimeephillips:** Why don't you return my phone calls?  
Lies! Damn Lies!

**@AlanahKiera:** Do you regret becoming famous or are you glad?  
I probs would have done things slightly differently

**@LaurieEllis15:** What are you most proud of?  
Helping people to come out of the closet all over the world

**@ourjanie:** Hey ... Will you be doing another volume of your autobiography?  
I don't think so. More singing & less talking!

**@MichelleLa\_11:** If you had to be someone else for one day, who would it be? xx  
Henry Cavill's cape!

**@MICKYSPUR:** Your fav all time DJ and all time track?  
Jon Pleased & Mr. Fingers - Can You Feel It?

**@PredWillM:** What makes you the most angry?  
Poverty, homophobia & bad food!

**@boygarland:** Madonna or GaGa?? :-)  
Madonna - I'm old school.

**@ChrissyBaby66:** How long did it take to complete your new album?  
4 months working leisurely

**@randiSav:** Do people still give you "Boy George" dolls?  
Someone waved a Boy Snoopy at me in Dallas!

**@micols77:** Which is your favourite Italian place?  
I love all of it, really. Italy is like a big delicious Pizza!

**@P0is0nedKoolA:** Who queens out more? You or Kanye?  
I'd say Kim Kardashian.

**@Barbiedoll\_1994:** Who would be your dream collaboration?  
David Bowie or Brian Eno.

**@gwennae:** What do you think is the best quality for a person to have?  
Buddhism.

**@piccola\_istrice:** Your biggest dream?  
World peace!

**@enfieldchar:** I loved TABOO, any chance it will

tour?"

Having meetings about Taboo this week!!!

**@Onlyrublevich:** Do U support the boycott of Olympics in Russia?"

Education is more important than protest.

**@Frankyfitz12:** What's more delicious - Milk chocolate or dark chocolate digestives?  
Milk chocolate, of course.

**@PrinceTaughtMe:** Who was your biggest competition, in your opinion?  
Addiction...

**@signmegalith:** Why are you so sexy??  
I don't think of myself like that :-)

**@Helenswuk84:** Hi George, love the new look, but what inspired the beard?  
Le Gateau Chocolat. Look him up!

**@Squash4Life:** Do you play squash???

**#crossesfingers**  
No, I don't even drink it!

**@phora13:** What is your biggest fear?  
That question.

**@laurabigon2:** Where would you like to live?  
Hampstead, luckily!

**@\_Laurindaa:** Who is your biggest musical inspiration?  
Bowie & Marc Bolan

**@\_Broost:** Who's your favourite artist of the moment? Love your new album!!xxx  
London Grammar & Hollie Cook

**@spears02904:** Please tell me you'll be touring up north sometime soon! Xx  
Next week in fact!

**@danihayami:** What you think about Brazil?  
The people are very sexy!

**@BellaEveeee:** What is your greatest achievement?  
Laughter and music

**@jasonturnstill:** Where do all your hats live?  
In the hat closet.

**@glambertkitten:** Eyeliner or lipstick?"  
Eyeliner

**@OldeWorldeMe:** Johnny Marr or Noel Galllagher?  
Half of each!

**@DebbieLongmuir:** What is your favourite restaurant in London?"  
The Wild Food Cafe in Covent Garden.

**@figs44:** What makes you laugh?  
My friends make me laugh

**@ericaophelia:** Do you need any eggs for baby growing?  
No

**@jodethechode94:** Would you say you express yourself more through music or appearance?  
Both are important, I feel.

**@RetroGemz:** Pasta or pizza?!

**@Glittergirl0404:** Do you believe in Ghosts?  
Not really...

**@JodieWould:** Where do you see yourself in 10 years?  
I'd rather concentrate on now :)

**@JOANNE73:** Any plans to come to Ireland?  
Yeah, of course!

**@thecordialdevil:** Do you prefer hats or beards?  
Both!

**@JaqBautista:** What is your favourite Asian food?  
Kimchi.

**@BoyGeorge:** Are you still spinning deep house?  
Yes, it's got deeper. You'll need a concrete handbag

**@ssakarita:** Are you a morning or evening person?  
Depends who I'm with.

**@SaintKitten\_:** Favourite film soundtrack?  
The Breakfast Club.

**@Sir\_Olly\_C:** I prefer George of the Jungle. Awesome film! :o)  
If you have learning difficulties..then YES!

**@gillesjr68:** Would you do a duet with Adele, that would sound AMAZING  
Yeah, if it was the right song.

**@A4HRD:** Is it true you did the handclaps on Suede's Filmstar?"  
I taught them everything they know.

**@JaqBautista:** Any musical instrument you want to learn?  
I'd love to learn the paino and harmonica.

**@lebell40:** Is there any one person you would like to meet?  
Obama and Eckhart Tolle.

**@barbaravitali2:** Do you prefer your Past or your Present?  
I prefer now always!

**@Matthew\_Leick:** Who's your favourite actor/actress?  
Maggie Smith, of course!

**@daveplufc:** Any regrets in life or does it make us who we are?  
It's good to have regrets, it gives us boundaries

*Thank you all for your lovely, weird & wonderful questions. Trending has been a treat! I'm flustered! #AskBoyGeorge*





# TRACKS OF MY YEARS

Hosted by Ken Bruce on BBC Radio 2, "Tracks Of My Years" has Ken's subject choose ten of their favourite tracks and discuss what it means to them...

**Ken Bruce:** What does George want first? Well, perhaps surprisingly - this!

## GEORGY GIRL

### THE SEEKERS



### Georgy Girl THE SEEKERS

Boy George: Well, I always used to think that song was about me! (laughs) It says "put down your dowdy feathers and fly" and I'm called George O'Dowd, so I always used to, when I was a kid I thought "it's obviously about me"... "You're always window shopping but never stopping to buy"... there were so many things in that song! When I was a kid, I was obviously picked on a lot at school because I was different, and that song always felt like "they obviously wrote that about me!" And I used to get called Georgy Girl a lot, especially after that song. So yeah, it's just that I love it.

**KB:** Excellent! When you heard that song, was it kind of your anthem in a way?

BG: Well, it kind of made me feel like someone out there understands me! (laughs)

**KB:** I suppose at that time it was quite an important thing for you, wasn't it?

BG: Yeah, absolutely. A lot of the songs on my list are songs that made me feel like that, and a lot of the artists that I loved like Bowie and Bolan, it was like "they get me". I'm one of them!

**KB:** They're coming from the same place.

BG: Yeah, probably not in any way, but when you're thirteen... and when Bowie says "Turn on with me you're

wonderful" obviously he realises my predicament.

### Metal Guru T-REX

BG: Marc Bolan was one of those people, that when I first saw him on TV, I just was like "Oh my God", the glittery eyes, the songs, and a couple years ago I did a tribute thing at Shepherd's Bush Empire where loads of people did Marc Bolan songs. He was such an unusual songwriter, because even though Bowie was surreal, no one wrote lyrics like Marc Bolan "What's it like to be a loon? I liken it to a balloon" "All alone with my washing machine..." Only Marc could write stuff like that, and I think Metal Guru is just a powerhouse of a song. It's a great, great pop record with those kind of productions that were done around that time are some of my favourite pop records.

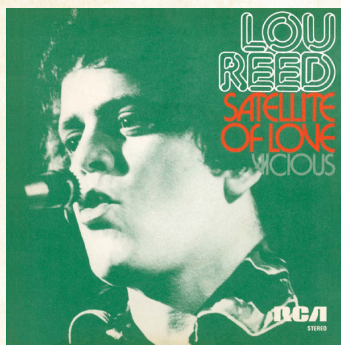


### Raspberry Beret PRINCE

BG: Prince is a difficult one, because I've got so many favourite Prince songs. I think he's written some beautiful songs, but this one - I just think it's a really cute pop song. Prince is someone that uses lyrics in a very individual way, he gets away with stuff that other people probably wouldn't get away with and he's a really unique artist. I met him once - he was kinda odd - but he's Prince, so he's allowed to be odd! There's certain people that you meet that you just think "OK, that was weird" but it's Diana Ross, it's Prince... there's certain people that you forgive.

**KB:** When they get to a certain level of ability or stardom, they can get away with anything.

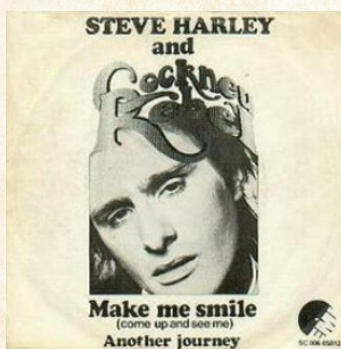
BG: Absolutely. I remember the first time I heard the album Purple Rain, I was blown away by that record, and I just became an instant fan - and still am, I like the new stuff he's doing "Breakfast Can Wait" but if I had to choose one of the pop songs, Raspberry Beret's got the lot, hasn't it really?



### Satellite of Love LOU REED

**KB:** The late Lou Reed with Satellite of Love.

BG: Well, it's just such a beautiful song, and even though it's been covered by lots of people - U2, The Eurythmics have done it - but the original really is just a magical record. And obviously Lou Reed was a massive influence on Bowie, and discovered him through Bowie. I saw Lou Reed for the first time in 1974 at Charlton Football Ground with The Who. He's one of those artists who have really changed my life, and I think that original album with The Velvet Underground and Nico and I think also Transformer, they're two records that you have to have if you're a credible music fan. They're two records that you can't really live without. You've got no credibility if you haven't got those records. And Lou wasn't a typical classic singer, but he just something about him, and I think Transformer and this particular song is just a very unique record.



### Come Up And See Me COCKNEY REBEL

BG: I was always a massive Steve Harley & Cockney Rebel fan, and I met him a couple years ago and he gave me a Marc Bolan badge, so I was very happy. I actually used to fancy Steve as well (laughs), still do a bit! I just love this song. I mean, there's loads of Cockney Rebel songs obviously that I love, but this one is just so joyous. It's a joyous song - you hear this and it puts you in a good mood, and I'm a massive, massive fan.

**KB:** Right, I'm sure he's a massive fan of yours.

BG: He loves me!

**KB:** Of course he does!

BG: (laughs)



### Sweetest Thing U2

BG: U2 is another band where it's hard to choose just one particular song, but I remember loving the video to this. It's really bonkers with the elephants and all sorts of mad things happening. I think this song was originally a b-side, but it stands up as one of my favourite U2 songs. I just think the sentiment is really sweet, and again, it's quite an unorthodox arrangement, but it just works, doesn't it?

**KB:** They get a bit of stick these days - well, Bono does - particularly for the positions he takes

BG: He does, but the thing is, to me it's all about the music. I can separate whatever he does or doesn't do from the band, and I think the band has done loads of records that I love - there's certain tracks that you just hear and they make you feel great and that's all I care about. We can discuss the other stuff over dinner! (laughs)



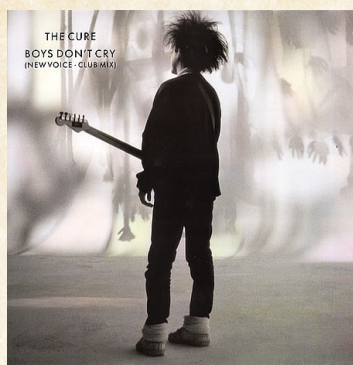
### Boys Keep Swinging DAVID BOWIE

BG: Bowie is such a hard artist to choose one song from. He's one of those people that's just wherever he's been, he's kind of narrowed down what was going on, and I think Boys Keep Swinging was one of those moments when Bowie just appeared and just





always seemed to be there to turn sexual ideas on their head. The lyrics to this song are great and it's very joyous, it's stellar Bowie for me.



## Boys Don't Cry THE CURE

BG: I've always been a Cure fan since the punk days really, and this is a great, great piece of pop. Different to a lot of their stuff, but it just kinda shows when they want to be really poppy, they can and I think they make really cool pop, it's kinda edgy, gothy, pop.

**KB: Well, it is still pop.**

BG: It's pop with wonky lipstick, which is the best kind of pop!



## Girls and Boys BLUR

BG: Damon Albarn - I've only met him once - he just laughed at me for ten minutes. He was quite drunk! (laughs) But I'm a big admirer of him, I mean he's a very talented man, and again, he's one of those people that seems to be able to do different types of music and do it well - annoyingly! This is a song that I sometimes play at the end of my DJ sets depending on what sort of party it is. It's infectious, and it's one of those great sexually ambiguous pop songs.

**KB: There's been a slight theme running through the songs this week...**



BG: Yeah, I guess I'm mindful of that! (laughs)

## Always On My Mind ELVIS PRESLEY

**KB: Anyway, here's Elvis to finish the week with "Always On My Mind"**

BG: What a beautiful song this is - the sentiment of the song is very simple but so true for all of us. It's just such a beautiful song, and of course who doesn't love Elvis Presley? He was the most beautiful pop star ever and with a great voice. Often God divides, but with Elvis's case, he just gave him everything didn't he? - but unfortunately with a hint of madness which was his downfall. But no, I just think of all of his songs and this is a Willie Nelson song is just a great, great love song.

**Now your own music at the moment - first studio album in how many years, is it?**

It's certainly 18 years since I've done a studio album with a band. I've done other sorts of electronic projects, and I've done collaborations with Mark Ronson, and this and that - but yes, it's been a while since I've actually made an organic record.

**But you've been doing a lot of DJing over the years, as we know...**

DJing has been a fantastic second career for me and you know, it's almost a parallel universe, because if you don't go to clubs, you don't know what I do or where I play, but it's become a global thing now so we're all over the place. We've just come back from America for 6 weeks.

**It's massive isn't it?**

It's huge. Obviously I don't play what they call the EDM stuff, I don't play the poppy stuff. It's more underground, deep house, tech house. If you don't like dance music, you won't enjoy my dance sets! (laughs)

**Telling it straight! You're looking, if I may say, very, very well these days.**

Thank you. I was turning into a crumbling version of myself at one point so I thought I'd better sort things out (laughs)

**So do you go to the gym every day, or what...**

Not every day, but I do work out quite a bit and I sleep a lot.

**You're in a good place.**

I am in a good place, yeah. I kind of freaked out when I turned 50! (laughs) Which was two years ago - I was kind of the way of sorting myself out and I turned 50 and I just suddenly went "oh my God, I'm fifty!" Now I'm 52. It was always my plan to get sensible at 40, I thought it was a good age to be sensible, it took me another 7 years but I'm here now (laughs!) Finally!

**50 is the new 40.**

Absolutely! So that's what we keep telling ourselves (laughs)

**George, great to see you, thank you so much for your choices.**

Thank you.

## It's taken a while, but the Boy George has grown up

*The iconic singer talks to Sarah Walters about his stunning transformation and new album*

No doubt about it, Boy George once again looks as fantastic as he sounds.

It has been a long journey back to health and happiness following years of drug abuse, battles with weight problems, the loss of his father Gerry eight years ago and even a period in prison.

But the former Culture Club frontman has committed himself to a radical diet and exercise regime that has seen him shed stones, and those androgynous good looks that made him a pin up in the 1980s have returned - most notably his chiselled jawline, no longer painted in with heavy black make-up.

This 2013 version of Boy George is also more inspired, in control, and content in the spotlight. "I keep getting people coming up to me saying, 'I'm going to Facebook my mum that I met you'. They used to say, 'Oh, I thought he was dead'," he laughs.

"People have always been lovely to me, really. There's been my relationship with the media, which has not been so lovely, but now I think, 'What can you say about me you haven't said?'. Now I'm my best PR."

His staggering new look aside, the most important new development for George is his new record - the first proper studio album he has written with a full band in 18 years, picking up from Cheapness and Beauty in 1995. Why now? "It was just time," he smiles. "It didn't seem like 18 years to me, time flies when you're having fun. Or falling apart."

The album, This Is What I Do (released this week), features the kind of possessive pop that George hasn't penned in some time. He tours it this month, starting at Manchester's Royal Northern College of Music tomorrow, and his excitement at the prospect couldn't be more palpable.

Across 11 original tracks of contemplative and assured anthems which draw on his signature reggae, soul and country influences, plus one fabulous cover of Yoko Ono's Death Of Samantha, it airs a few demons (My God, Feel The Vibration) and imparts hard-earned wisdom about self-acceptance ("Have I lost my crown," he asks on opening track King Of Everything, "or will I begin again?").

In part, it's the sound of liberation after spending 25 years behind the DJ decks, but it also owes a little bit to age. "When I turned 50, I was like, 'Wow! I'm FIF-TY!'," he laughs. "Up until then, 49, 45, I couldn't care less. But 50 was big for me. I'd already planned to become sensible at 40, and I wasn't successful in that plan!

"Round about 46, I really pulled it together. If someone had told me to grow up 25 years ago, I'd have been really insulted by the concept. Now, I'm really glad I've grown up because I'm a much nicer person to be around. I might have thought I was fun before, but at this point I do look back on myself and think, 'Who were you, and what were you talking about?'."

"Life is about learning to be yourself; a lot of people spend their lives trying to be someone else but there's really no one you can be but your bad self."

Cohabiting with his "bad self" is a living arrangement George - born George O'Dowd in Kent, in 1961 - has had to manage since he was in his early teens. He was a "born weirdo" who got deeply involved in the New Romantic and punk scenes by his mid-teens, cross-dressed, lived in the notorious London squats, and famously manned the door at Steve Strange's famous Blitz club.

By his late teens, he was putting Culture Club together, and by 21 he was racking up international hits with Do You Really Want To Hurt Me?, Church Of The Poison Mind and Karma Chameleon.

By the time they were recording their third album, in 1986, George's drug addiction was making global headlines, his house was flooded by police after pal Michael Rudetsky was found dead from a heroin overdose, and the group was on its knees.

Almost three decades later, George is sober and clean. "I was thrust into being famous as a young man and at 19, I thought I was in charge," he remembers. "For the most part, I think I really came across like I was in charge, so when I did fall apart people were like, 'Oh my god, I thought you were so sensible'."

"I haven't been sensible with my life. Although I wouldn't want people to think it has all been chaotic, there have been periods of absolute clarity and sanity. But when I have fallen apart I've done it spectacularly.

"I think my sense of humour has been my saving grace. My ability to have a laugh at myself and the stupid situations, to ask myself, 'What have you done now?'!"

"But in a way, the big relief for me is working out that things don't have to be difficult; life throws problems at you whatever you do, but only you can make it worse for yourself.

"At this point in my life, it's very easy to have hindsight that I should have seen what was going on. But really when you're in it, you're just thinking about getting through it. It's only now that I can gasp at what I've done."

- manchestereveningnews.co.uk



## Boy George dials back the drama

*Latest album earning praise as 'comeback of the year'*

Gender-bending songwriter, DJ and Culture Club frontman George O'Dowd (aka Boy George), 52, has cut back on his trademark sass these days. He's hoping instead people will focus on his music, specifically his new self-produced, self-funded solo album, *This Is What I Do*.

Although he wrote most of the songs and they reflect a wiser, convivial Boy George, a new cover called *Death of Samantha* also showcases O'Dowd's knack for styling a song. Originally recorded by Yoko Ono and said to be inspired by John Lennon's adultery, O'Dowd's cathartic, soulful take makes the track sound like it was plucked from his own troubled past.

"I just don't have an appetite for writing and talking about my own drama anymore," O'Dowd says in a phone interview from Austin, Texas, moments before DJing at Republic nightclub.

"Some days, I just want to say to myself, 'shut the f--- up, queen — a degree of mystery is a beautiful thing.' I think I need to sing more and talk less ..." he says, stopping mid-sentence to chuckle, "...which will be a big challenge."

The songs on *This Is What I Do* stray from his scandals to speak to O'Dowd's faith, recovery and enlightened state. The album's recipe of ska, folk, pop and reggae has already built substantial buzz: *The Guardian* calls it, "the comeback of the year" and *The Irish Times* anointed his husky crooning as "consistently gorgeous."

O'Dowd's candour remains just as captivating as his music. Of his latest look, makeup that mixes facial hair with glitter he jokingly calls "bearded lady," O'Dowd says his face is a nod to the historic gay daisy chain of artists he wants people to know about.

Lately he is enamoured with the late Hibiscus of The Cockettes, the cross-dressing founder of a 1970s psychedelic theatre troupe. Much of what he wears could be seen as a sartorial fight against the norm, a suggestion that pleases him. "That sounds like a good headline so I'll take it," he says.

He names a few other envelope-pushing looks he's donned through the decades, including homages to the late performance artist Leigh Bowery (during the run of O'Dowd's Broadway show *Taboo* in 2003), his Japanese Geisha doll get-ups of '82 and his Cleopatra-meets-Joan Collins outfits circa 1985. That prompted Diana Ross to raid his closet and take home a few sparkly pieces he had picked up at a bazaar in Egypt.

O'Dowd's most important style moments remain his collaboration with Sue Clowes, the London-based fashion designer who helped mould the image he wanted for Culture Club band's 1982 debut, *Kissing To Be Clever* (and the mega-hit *Do You Really Want To Hurt Me*). From T-shirts printed with the words "Clone War" (a deliberate attack on homogeneous dressing) to Rastafarian head wraps and hats commonly worn by Hasidic Jewish men — all these clothes were part of O'Dowd's one-nation, symbol-heavy vision.

"The idea was to wear the Utopian dream on our sleeves because we could see it in the band," he says of clothes that printed a cross-section of backgrounds and beliefs, political, social and otherwise. "I was plundering cultures at a very early age and we had this multicultural pop group with a Jewish guy, a Jamaican, an Anglo-Saxon and Gay Irish, so we wanted to kind of make that part of our kind of visual focus."



"I always had that magpie mentality. If I saw someone in religious garb, I wanted to know what they're about and why they dress like that and where I could get the outfit. Sue made all of these smock-ey outfits — they were genderless."

For 1983s *Colour By Numbers* — the band's bestselling album to date — O'Dowd went to fashion designer Dexter Wong for assistance. "For him it was all about men's shirts that would bleed into dresses. It was a little bit Arabic, a little bit Indian and it was all about creating an illusion of perfection and covering up what I believed to be my defects."

"Everything had to be mask-like," he says, speaking to a time when he and Culture Club drummer Jon Moss had a closeted, stormy affair (much of it is addressed in lyrics of their hits). "The clothes were like the makeup — they hid so much but they still said a lot."

Aside from turbulent romance and the obsession with all things foreign, his precursor David Bowie and London underground clubs also fuelled O'Dowd's look and sound in the '80s. The fact that these two main inspirations have recently been turned into major art exhibitions makes him a little wary.

"I haven't gotten around to the (Victoria and Albert Museum's From Club to Catwalk) exhibit but I've lived it so I've got a rough idea of what's happened," he says, laughing.

"It's a weird thing when you've locked Bowie in a museum, though. It becomes analytical rather than political or sensual. If you don't have the personality of the person in the clothes then you're missing a huge chunk of what it was about."

When asked about his own work being in display cases one day, O'Dowd sighs. "At some point there will have to be some sort of exhibition," he says. "but a lot of it would have to be remade. Sorry to disappoint all the old fashion queens, but that's the way it is. I lived in those clothes so most of them have fallen apart. They weren't costumes. But I've got a few of my old Yohji Yamamoto pieces and old (Jean Paul) Gaultier pieces in a room filled with cupboards. That said, when Jean Paul Gaultier did his (summer 2013) collection and did all those great kind of '80s images I thought it was brilliant."

He also believes developing a distinctive look for pop artists today must be much harder than it was when he started.

"I came from a generation that was starved of glamour. Today anything that is vaguely interesting is kind of swallowed up by corporates and they use it to promote products or put it in a movie," O'Dowd says.

"The incubation period is over now. Things aren't allowed to blossom without interference from everyone because of the Internet."

"When I went to see Bowie when I was 13 it was a mythical experience — it was like we believed that there was a wizard behind the curtain and his name was Ziggy Stardust."

That experience is something he wishes could return for future pop audiences who are in need of a jolt of art with their chart hits.

"If you look at all the biggest stars that have got all the biggest following on Twitter, strangely none of them are really making any kind of cultural impact," O'Dowd says. "I think the idea is that we are saying a lot more but actually we're not saying very much."

- [www.calgaryherald.com](http://www.calgaryherald.com)



## Eminem single 'Rap God' criticised over homophobic lyrics

*Boy George has criticised Eminem's new single 'Rap God' over its use of homophobic lyrics.*

The US rapper's new track has been labelled "outdated and deeply offensive" by gay rights charity Stonewall, which also claimed he was "stuck in the last century".

Lyrics in the track include: "Breaking a motherf\*\*king table over the back of a couple f\*\*gots and crack it in half," and: "You f\*\*gs think it's all a game."

The second verse also contains the line: "Little gay-looking boy / So gay I can barely say it with a straight face-looking boy / You witnessing massacre like you watching a church gathering taking place-looking boy / Oy vey, that boy's gay, that's all they say looking-boy."

Culture Club singer Boy George tweeted directly to the rapper to condemn his use of the word "f\*\*g".

@Eminem Fag? Is this really recovery talk or are you running your own programme these days?

— Boy George (@BoyGeorge) October 17, 2013

The singer also lamented how openly gay singer Adam Lambert allegedly receives less airplay on US stations due to his sexuality.

He said: "I was talking about Adam yesterday in an interview and I said this very thing. If he was British, he'd be huge here!"

Back in 2010, Eminem defended his use of the word "f\*\*got", telling Anderson Cooper that it was used as a general insult rather than meaning homosexual where he grew up.

'Rap God' is set to reach the top five in this week's UK singles chart.

- [digitalspy.co.uk](http://digitalspy.co.uk)



### THIS WEEK WE ARE LOVING...

Boy George! His brand new album 'This Is What I Do' has been on repeat in the CFPR towers of late, we love his new healthy glow and simply had to find out a bit more...

**Face Saving Make-Up tip:** Tint your brows and keep them plucked. Every picture needs a frame!

**Desert Island product:** A solar powered radio!

**Favourite tippie:** Beetroot & pomegranate juice. I don't touch alcohol.

**Play-time or down-time:** Down-time, my work is always fun so doing nothing is amazing!

**Favourite thing in the world:** Food & music!

**Where you hope to be in ten years in ten words?** Older, wiser, happier, in love, thinner, faster, richer and laughing.

- [clareforde.com](http://clareforde.com)



# Boy George Talks, Miley Cyrus, Gay Pop Stars And New American DJ Tour

**Boy George has been turning heads and bending ears for over three decades.**

The groundbreaking musician, who released some of the biggest hits of the '80s and has been an in demand DJ since the '70s, is currently on a DJ tour across the U.S. alongside co-headliner Marc Vedo.

We recently caught up with George to chat about life on the road, his thoughts on Miley Cyrus, the reactions to his new look and more.

**The Huffington Post: This is your first time DJing in the U.S. in seven years. A lot has changed over that period in terms of the musical landscape. How has your approach to DJing changed along with the times?**

Boy George: The term EDM has come to represent a very European style of dance music in America, with the rise of DJs like Avicii and David Guetta, so I was slightly worried that my style would not fit in. I don't play big stadium-style dance but I have discovered, to my delight, that the appetite for real low slung deep house is very much alive. I'm of the opinion that as a DJ you must always play what you love and ignore what's "trendy" because true passion always eclipses what's fashionable. Quality is always fashionable.

**Many people think that DJing isn't a real profession or believe that anyone can just "push play." What's your response to that?**

Well, people say a lot of things but real DJing is about thinking on your feet. If you are a festival-type DJ playing the most popular tracks from this week's Beatport chart then you can pretty much push buttons and allow the audience to dictate the art form. A good DJ brings his personality and taste to the club and giving people what they think they want isn't always that interesting. A difficult crowd will always test your true ability. A lot of today's up-and-coming DJs have no experience of building a set or a career — a bit like some of today's instant pop stars.

**What's the biggest mistake a DJ can make mid-set? Do you have any DJing horror stories?**

Leaving to go to the toilet or having a conversation as the track is about to end! For myself the worst moments are having the wrong type of people in the club holding up pictures from twenty years ago. If you don't absolutely love "dance music" it's probably best not to come. Seeing bored looking fans staring at you while you DJ is about as horrible as it gets. The clue is in the title: "DANCE MUSIC!"

**You've gotten a lot of attention for your new look. How do you feel about the response?**

Some people hate the beard but I'm not really that bothered. It's my face. Yeah, it's nice to get compliments on how I look. I'm sure people were saying all sorts of derogatory things before! I feel great and I'm very happy.

**As someone who has been in the spotlight himself for having a controversial look and persona, how do you feel about all the drama regarding Miley Cyrus? Are you team Miley?**

You have Miley stripping naked at every opportunity and Kanye bringing Jesus on stage and then Gaga posting "Madonna hates Gaga" tweets. One wonders what it has to do with music but people have to find ways to get attention! I guess I find it mildly entertaining like the rest of you!

**When it comes to how much the music industry has changed since you first started out, what's the thing you miss the most or you're the most nostalgic for from that time?**

I'm retrophobic. [laughs] That's the name of my new dance project -- "Retrophobia." We use lots of vintage samples and give them a new twist. I'm not nostalgic for the past at all except that promoters used to be more hospitable, but that's about it. I feel you should honor and respect your legacy but then seriously get over it. I love now. It's all about now.

**You were one of the first very openly queer artists to make it in mainstream music. What was that like? Terrifying? Thrilling? Did anyone ever try to get you to tone down your image?**

I came out to my family at 15 so by the time I was in Culture Club I was pretty fearless. I had to keep it to myself because people around me thought it would damage my career but I think everyone worked it out pretty quickly. I think coming out is a very personal thing and I now feel it is an individual choice. If you are not attacking other people then you should be able to keep it private. I think it's always best for one's own soul and personal happiness to come out. The closet is not a joyful place but you must feel safe before you make the decision to go public!

**When do you think we'll see a huge gay male pop star? What will have to change for that to be possible?**

I hope it never comes down to that. I prefer to live in a world where you are judged on talent and sexuality is completely secondary. There have been many successful openly gay artists -- George Michael, Neil Tennant, Marc Almond -- but the bravest was always Jimmy Somerville. I'm doubtful if we will ever live in a world where sexuality won't be an issue for at least a small minority. Homophobia and racism are part of the human condition.

**Is there anything that you specifically look forward to (a food? a city?) whenever you tour the U.S.?**

I love Seattle the most and this time we stayed in Alki Beach and people were so sweet. This trip has been a great experience and we have had some bonkers gigs. Dallas and San Francisco stand out but I have seen how good it can be. We had a couple of brilliant gigs in Canada in Winnipeg and Castlegar in British Columbia. I'm a Wholefoods freak and wherever I go in the US I'm straight online looking for Wholefoods and Starbucks -- I love my morning doppio espresso!

- [huffingtonpost.com](http://huffingtonpost.com)



George with Grace Jones at the private view of Isabella Blow: Fashion Galore! Party





# MAD ABOUT THE BOY

WORDS STUART CLARK

He's topped the charts, spent time in the clinker and ran the gamut of tabloid drug infamy. Somehow **BOY GEORGE** is still here and about to drop a cracking new solo album. He talks about his unlikely love affair with inner city Dublin (he has family there), the exquisite heartache of overnight success and how he's survived a lifetime of fast-lane turmoil.

**"Y**eah, I'm over to Ireland a lot because my mum's family are from places like Finglas," Boy George reveals backstage at the City Varieties Music Hall in Leeds, where he's gigging tonight. "I've two aunts living there who I'll hopefully get to see when I'm back doing a gig in December. It's a DJ set by the way – other people's stuff, no singing! I've had people tweeting me going, 'The least you could have done is stuck 'Karma Chameleon' on.' Er, no, that would be like masturbating in public! My dad's relatives are spread out all over the place – Ballymena, Portrush, Thurles, everywhere.

"We were over pretty much every school holiday when I was a growing up. I used to be called 'The Quare Fellow', which was a bit cleverer than I first thought because of the Brendan Behan reference. Literary or not, it still wasn't what you wanted to be hearing as a kid."

It was literally minutes before sitting down with George that news of the 2015 Irish Gay Marriage referendum broke.

"It's a funny one because for me, gay marriage is quite a conservative idea," he proffers. "I uphold anyone's right to do that, but it's not something that appeals to me. It's kind of gay people buckling down, doing the right thing, which you'd think these right-wing types would embrace. I personally like the fact that I don't have to join the army; I don't have to have kids; I don't have any responsibilities. I mean, I can barely look after a hat!"

No one at George's record company or management has told us not to quiz him about his heroin/assault/prison/obesity hells but given that they happened four years ago and have been mined to exhaustion by the tabloids, we're going to take the revolutionary step of mainly talking to him about... music.

"You know that saying, 'There's no such thing as bad publicity?' Bollocks! 'It's better to be talked about than not being talked about at all?' Bollocks too," the once again svelte and highly affable 52-year-old resumes. "It's totally my own fault, though, for fucking up. I've managed to stay out of trouble for quite a while now, and got myself back into the music pages. I'm focusing on the present and absolutely loving it. I never stopped writing, so I've got tonnes and tonnes of stuff that's recorded or semi-recorded and which may or may not come out in the future. On the new album, 'Live Your Life' and 'Play Me' are respectively six and nine-years-old. They came back from the abyss whereas other songs are redundant because what was in my head then isn't what's in my head now."

The first thing that strikes you listening to *This Is What I Do* is how George's voice has matured from the falsetto of old into a weather-beaten growl that Leonard Cohen himself would be proud of.

"Somebody tweeted yesterday, 'Boy George has turned into a baritone overnight...' What a load of old rubbish, it's taken 50 years. When I was younger I had more of a head voice – some

of those early Culture Club recordings are very nasal. As you get older you go deeper and sing from a more gravitational place. Then there's all my bad behaviour, which brought me down an octave or three!"

Off drugs, teetotal and mostly vegan, George joins David Bowie, Dave Gahan and Noel Gallagher on the list of people who look far healthier than they have a right to given their past misdeeds.

"All that stuff in the papers about Lou Reed 'paying for his past sins' – he was seventy-fucking-one when he died. I saw him supporting The Who at the Charlton Athletic football ground in 1974, although I was told not to. I was a very wilful 14-year-old and the opportunity of seeing Lou Reed in Woolwich was such a once in a lifetime chance. I got into a lot of trouble for being at that gig, but I was happy to take the punishment.

"It was around the time of the *Rock N' Roll Animal* album, so he had the bleached hair and the guyliner on. I wanted him to be this exotic alien creature and he didn't let me down! He was probably quite wasted at that gig. In my relative innocence I didn't notice!"

How did George go from being a face in the crowd to the person the crowd wanted to see?

"We used to go to this weekly night at a pub in Blackfen called The Black Prince – it was in the middle of a motorway and has since become a Holiday Inn," he recalls. "It was a bit of a pre-punk soul thing, with people wearing a lot of army gear and plastic sandals and Hawaiian shirts. There were a few bin-liners too, which is maybe where Malcolm McLaren got the idea! 'Funkytown' by Lipps Inc was one of the big anthems there. I met some older kids who were a little bit more trendy than me and we started going up to the West End."

When I asked Nile Rodgers recently to sum up the Studio 54 madness, he said, "Bianca Jagger celebrating her 27<sup>th</sup> birthday by taking to the dancefloor on a thoroughbred white stallion while the rest of us consumed our bodyweight in champagne... amongst other things."

Are there similar tales of Bacchanalian New Romantic excess?

"Compared to Studio 54 it was actually a very, very small scene with lots of hairspray and even more ego," George grins. "That it spread all over the country and then all over the world is one of those happy accidents that none of us anticipated. For me the '70s were the most important decade because that's when I discovered all the artists and music that I loved from glam to punk to electro. Being a teenager then was really exciting. 1980 and '81 were good too, but then Culture Club took off and for four years it was non-stop obsessive work."

"It used to be a huge bugbear that while we were parked up in some motorway service station Duran Duran and their leggy model girlfriends were off in the Seychelles making videos on the back of a yacht. Roy, Jon and Mikey hated that! Looking back now, nobody was really in control. When you're that successful so quickly you're not really at the driving wheel. You're young and

happy to go with the flow because it's all new and exciting. It's only when you've done it 400 times that you suddenly go, 'Fuck off, no!'"

George did get to cameo alongside H.M. Murdock, B.A. Baracus, Hannibal Smith and Templeton Peck on an episode of *The A-Team* though.

"Duran Duran did *Miami Vice*, we ended up with *The A-Team*," he grimaces. "It was one of those things that sounded like a good idea at the time, and then once you're doing it it's, 'Oh my God...' When they're enticing you to do these shows you're told, 'You're going to be playing yourself, it'll be really easy.' Then you get there and they want you to talk in a fake American accent. George Peppard was very, very charming and apologetic because Mr. T and all the other guys were rowing like a band. Well, rowing like our band! It was towards the end of '87 when things between us weren't good."

Culture Club derived their name from the fact they had a gay Irish singer, a black English guitarist and a Jewish drummer in their ranks.

It was a wonderful two-fingered riposte to the National Front, British Movement and Combat 18 who ruled the racist roost back then. Three decades on and, sadly, the knucklehead element remains, with the British National Party and the English Defence League both doing their best to portray every UK-residing Muslim as a potential suicide bomber. What does George make of the, "Is Islam compatible with democratic western principles" debate that's raging across the Irish Sea at the moment?

"To burqa or not to burqa... that is the question," he notes. "I know this isn't the answer you're looking for, but I don't really think in terms of race or sexuality. I've this comedian friend, David Hoyle, who says, 'There's two types of people – nice ones and cunts!' and he's spot on. You can sit down with six drag queens at a dinner table and hear the most horrific things coming out of people's mouths. You know, just because you think you have something in common with someone, it doesn't necessarily mean that you do."

"Unfortunately, we tend to put each other in boxes and say: 'Well, if you're this, you must be that.' Some people conform to the stereotype, but then there are a lot of others who don't. It's very dangerous to look at someone in a burqa and say, 'Oh, they're a fundamentalist.' I don't want to pull rank, but as an obviously gay man who grew up during the '70s and '80s, I know what it's like to be an outsider."

Does George still feel like an outsider?

"No," he shoots back. "I was lucky because I'm from a very supportive family who never disowned me. When I was 15 and came out, they didn't necessarily want to talk about it but I was very wilful and made them include it in their lives. I never allowed them to brush it under the carpet. We went from, you know, 'Spare us the details' to, 'It's normal now.' My family discovered recently that I've a gay cousin and no one batted an eyelid. If that had been 20 years ago... Society needs to have somebody to be frightened of and at the moment, sadly, it's Muslims."

Getting back to musical business, and *This Is What I Do*'s numerous highlights include a version of Yoko Ono's 'Dear Samantha' that was originally intended for a covers project that George may revisit in the future.

"A make-up artist friend of mine who's since died,



Paul Starr, introduced me to Yoko a few years ago. Up till then I'd thought, 'She just screams and it's all ethereal' like everybody else. It's a song that I wish I'd written. I did the Meltdown festival that Yoko curated during the summer in London. She did a *Double Fantasy* concert, so there were people like Peaches, Bishi, Julian Lennon, Patti Smith, Siouxsie Sioux and me plus this brilliant violinist named Amadéus Leopold. You have to check him out."

Patti Smith, I have to say, is one of the people on my interview bucket-list. What kind of a character is she?

"It's funny, she fell on me backstage at Meltdown but we only met properly for the first time two weeks ago in New York. It's always best to wait for the right moment with the people you really admire. I spotted her leaving the restaurant we both happened to be in, stood up and was like, 'Hey...' and she was lovely."

Any sightings of the aforementioned Mr. Bowie while he was in The Big Apple?

"No, I had dinner with David in 2005 but haven't seen him since I don't think. Having a long break can be good for you and your audience – well, that's what I'm hoping! It's wonderful as a relative youngster to think, 'Yeah, you can still be musically relevant when you're in your seventies.' Bowie's still got it."

Whereas Culture Club were purveyors of reggae lite, a couple of the tracks on George's new record are the real roots radical deal.

"Around '72/'73 there was a lot of poppier reggae like Ken Boothe, Susan Cadogan, Johnny Nash, Pluto Shervington and Dave and Ansell Collins," he says, switching into musical historian mode. "Then I got into the more kind of righteous stuff – Bob Marley obviously, Dillinger, all those guys. But earlier it was all lovers' rock, really."

If anyone doubted that George could still cut it live, they were proved spectacularly wrong earlier this month by his *Later... With Jools Holland* appearance.

"I love it because it's such a musical show. We did three songs and got a great reaction. The Killers were on too. I said to Brandon Flowers, 'You've the best name in showbusiness after Ban Ki Moon and Condoleezza Rice.' He's a proper rock star. Lorde, Lana Del Rey... there are some interesting people around at the moment. There always are if you're bothered to go looking for them."

Casting a steely eye over the past 35 years of mischief making, what are the moments George wouldn't swap for the world?

"The first time 'Do You Really Want To Hurt Me' got played on the radio – I think it was 'Diddy' David Hamilton – was amazing," he reminisces fondly. "And then obviously the first number one – you can't match that. Playing Madison Square Garden and getting a Grammy are things you don't forget either. To be honest though, I get way more excited now than I did back in the day because as a 20-year-old you're full of your own self-importance. I felt like it was always going to be like that – and then found that, no, shit happens to everybody including me. To hand on heart be able to say I'm loving life at the moment is a pretty good result!"

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*This Is What I Do* is out now. See [hotpress.com](http://hotpress.com) for news of George's upcoming Dublin DJ gig





SNAPSHOT

# THIS IS WHAT I DO



**BOY  
GEORGE**  
KING  
OF  
EVERYTHING

23/45

Ray @ X

10/21/11  
11/11/11