



Taking it Like a Man

You could have been forgiven for forgetting Boy George. It's been a long time since George has been a radio staple. In recent years the man's music has been overtaken by his private life. There have been tussles with the tabloids, drug addiction and rehabilitation — but precious little in the way of the chart hungry George-pop which made Culture Club such heavyweight contenders a decade ago.

But all that may have changed. 1995 may just be the year of Boy Nausea.

In London's Green House recording studio, George has been putting the finishing touches on his new album *Cheapness and Beauty*. It's a brash and brazen collection of songs, tinged with a punky flavour and stuttering guitars, and has comeback written all over it.

But this is a comeback with a difference. The Boy George of 1995 is a very different, even after you come to terms with his changed appearance.

Dressed in jeans, a black jersey and some hiking boots, a remarkably relaxed Boy George seems worlds away from the days of Culture Club and his haggard appearance during his heroin addiction. His hair is shorn to a shadow skinhead, his features rounded. He looks comfortable and happy. He speaks briskly, holding eye contact and answering questions with a directness that's not often encountered.

Cheapness and Beauty, set for release sometime in May, is Boy George's most ambitious album to date. It's a strange brew too; some gloriously over the top punk/glam rubbing shoulders with acoustic ballads. It sounds suspiciously like Boy George has

kissed the world of dance-pop a fond farewell and started a steamy affair with rock music, in all its sweaty, guitar heavy glory.

"As far as this record goes, I didn't want it to be too eclectic. I like to call this music 'attitude pop'. Rock music, to me, is something like Bon Jovi, whereas the likes of Nirvana and Smashing Pumpkins is what I'd call attitude pop.

"I think the lyrics are a lot more direct on this album, therefore the music needs to be a lot more direct as well."

A few ripples have already been caused by the first single, a crashingly over-the-top remake of Iggy Pop's 'Funtime'.

"When I was writing the album I brought in all my favourite CDs and said: 'This is the kind of attitude.'"

"I've always been a big David Bowie fan, and through David Bowie I got into Iggy Pop. David Bowie actually did the backing vocals on that track, so doing it is like killing two birds with one stone.

"I think it's quite a lusty song. I like the effect it has... 'We like your pants,'" he sings suddenly. The mind boggles.

While the rest of the album doesn't quite reach the breakneck pace of 'Funtime', the album is nothing, if not confrontational. Despite the fact the album is George's fourth since leaving Culture Club, it could be almost a fresh start. George is the first to admit his previous efforts lacked direction; and when they didn't succeed as he'd hoped, he would blame anyone but himself.

"The problem was that I didn't have very much direction. Once I'd left Culture Club I was very confused. I had lots of ideas, but no direction.

"A lot of the time I was blaming the record company and other people — not myself. Now I can look at that part of my career and see that, yes, I was wrong."

The change in George's career has taken time, but the effects are already being felt. Years of therapy and psychological help, not to mention a macrobiotic diet and immersion in his dance project More Protein have cut off some of the rough edges.

"Once I got the focus for this record, I went to the record company and said to them: 'This is what I want to do.' It was amazing the affect that it had on them. Obviously I've got a really good A&R man now (Paul Kinder of Virgin), which has been a real life saver. It's the first time since Culture Club anyone's had a clue about me. And it's really good when an A&R man likes the same kind of music that you do," George says.

Cheapness and Beauty's strongest lyrical theme seems that of coming to terms with who you are and the mistakes you may have made in the past. It could also be described as George's 'coming out' record — news that's unlikely to shock many people certainly, but it's the first time his music has touched the subject with any depth.

"Over the last five years I've been writing a book and doing a lot of group therapy. If you do it in a belligerent way, you don't have a positive effect on people. You teach best by example. Writing my book has helped me put my life in perspective."

George's autobiography (entitled *Take It Like A Man*) deals closely with the time his career looked like disintegrating; having gone public about his heroin addiction, and having made no secret about his sexuality, he endured a very public kicking campaign by the

media. His public image has taken a very long time to heal.

Does the bitterness remain? Seemingly not.

"I saw that I'd been a real cunt sometimes," George says matter of factly. "And, believe me, there's a huge relief in being able to say that!

"People said it was the press that ruined my career. That's giving them far too much credit. They didn't make me a singer or a personality in the first place. I gave them something to write about. I don't know if I ever really blamed them, but I did feel sorry for myself. I was just coming off the drugs too. I went to this homoeopathic doctor and he told me that I had basically given up on life, I'd stopped caring about myself. I had had 100 doctors prescriptions for various things, but that one conversation did me the world of good." George smiles. "He told me: 'Get off your ass and do something about it!'"

The new model Boy George, complete with his Iggy Pop covers, has made: "a commitment to enjoy myself. I don't mean that in a hedonistic way. I mean enjoying myself while being aware of other people. I had got to the point where I thought: 'If I wanted to have sex with 20 rent boys, I would do it.' I've read a lot over the last five years... and I suppose I've realised the most important thing is relationships. I love working, and that's that, but there's nothing more important than making that phone call, keeping that lunch appointment."

Age may have mellowed the man, but the new appreciation of the less destructive side of life has left him with the best chance of staging a 90s comeback. Get ready for Boy Nausea.

STEPHEN DOWLING