David Bowie

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Born and raised in Brixton, London, South London, Bowie developed an early interest in music although his attempts to succeed as a pop star during much of the 1960s were frustrated. "Space Oddity" became his first top five entry on the UK Singles Chart after its release in July 1969. After a three-year period of experimentation, he re-emerged in 1972 during the glam rock era with his flamboyant and androgynous alter ego Ziggy Stardust. The character was spearheaded by his single "Starman" and album The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars. Bowie's impact at that time, as described by biographer David Buckley, "challenged the core belief of the rock music of its day" and "created perhaps the biggest cult in popular culture".[2] The relatively short-lived Ziggy persona proved to be one facet of a career marked by reinvention, musical innovation and visual presentation.

Early life

Bowie was born in Brixton, London. His mother, Margaret Mary "Peggy" ,née Burns , from Kent,[3] worked as a waitress,[4] while his father, Haywood Stenton "John" Jones, from Yorkshire,[5] was a promotions officer for the children's charity Barnardo's. The family lived at 40 Stansfield Road, near the border of the south London areas of Brixton and Stockwell. Bowie attended Stockwell Infants School until he was six years old, acquiring a reputation as a gifted and single-minded child—and a defiant brawler.[6]

In 1953 the family moved to the suburb of Bromley, where, two years later, Bowie progressed to Burnt Ash Junior School. His voice was considered "adequate" by the school choir, and his recorder playing judged to demonstrate above-average musical ability.[7] At the age of nine, his dancing during the newly introduced music and movement classes was strikingly imaginative: teachers called his interpretations "vividly artistic" and his poise "astonishing" for a child.[7] The same year, his interest in music was further stimulated when his father brought home a collection of American 45s by artists including Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, the Platters, Fats Domino, Elvis Presley and Little Richard.[8][9] Upon listening to "Tutti Frutti", Bowie would later say, "I had heard God".[10] Presley's impact on him was likewise emphatic: "I saw a cousin of mine dance to ... 'Hound Dog' and I had never seen her get up and be moved so much by anything. It really impressed me, the power of the music. I started getting records immediately after that."[9] By the end of the following year he had taken up the ukulele and tea-chest bass and begun to participate in skiffle sessions with friends, and had started to play the piano; meanwhile his stage presentation of numbers by both Presley and Chuck Berry—complete with gyrations in tribute to the original artists—to his local Wolf Cub group was described as "mesmerizing ... like someone from another planet."[9] Failing his eleven plus exam at the conclusion of his Burnt Ash Junior education, Bowie joined Bromley Technical High School.[11]

Bowie studied art, music and design, including layout and typesetting. After Terry Burns, his half-brother, introduced him to modern jazz, his enthusiasm for players like Charles Mingus and John Coltrane led his mother to give him a plastic alto saxophone in 1961; he was soon receiving lessons from a local musician.[12] Bowie received a serious injury at school in 1962 when his friend George Underwood punched him in the left eye during a fight over a girl. Doctors feared he would become blind in that eye. After a series of operations during a four-month hospitalisation,[13] his doctors determined that the damage could not be fully repaired and Bowie was left with faulty depth perception and a permanently dilated pupil.

Career

1962–67: Early career to début album

Graduating from his plastic saxophone to a real instrument in 1962, Bowie formed his first band at the age of 15. Playing guitar-based rock and roll at local youth gatherings and weddings, the Konrads had a varying line-up of between four and eight members, Underwood among them.[15] When Bowie left the technical school the following year, he informed his parents of his intention to become a pop star. His mother promptly arranged his employment as an electrician's mate. Frustrated by his band-mates' limited aspirations, Bowie left the Konrads and joined another band, the King Bees. He wrote to the newly successful washing-machine entrepreneur John Bloom inviting him to "do for us what Brian Epstein has done for the Beatles—and make another million." Bloom did not respond to the offer, but his referral to Dick James's partner Leslie Conn led to Bowie's first personal management contract.[16]

Dissatisfied with his stage name as Davy ,and Davie Jones, which in the mid-1960s invited confusion with Davy Jones of the Monkees, Bowie renamed himself after the 19th-century American frontiersman Jim Bowie and the knife he had popularised.[18] His April 1967 solo single, "The Laughing Gnome", using speeded-up thus high-pitched vocals, failed to chart. Released six weeks later, his album debut, David Bowie, an amalgam of pop, psychedelia, and music hall, met the same fate. It was his last release for two years.[19]

1968–76: Space Oddity to Hunky Dory

Bowie met dancer Lindsay Kemp in 1967 and enrolled in his dance class at the London Dance Centre.[20] He commented in 1972 that meeting Kemp was when his interest in image "really blossomed".[20] "He lived on his emotions, he was a wonderful influence. His day-to-day life was the most theatrical thing I had ever seen, ever. It was everything I thought Bohemia probably was. I joined the circus."[21] Studying the dramatic arts under Kemp, from avant-garde theatre and mime to commedia dell'arte, Bowie became immersed in the creation of personae to present to the world. Satirising life in a British prison, meanwhile, the Bowie-penned "Over the Wall We Go" became a 1967 single for Oscar; another Bowie composition, "Silly Boy Blue", was released by Billy Fury the following year.[22] In January 1968 Kemp choreographed a dance scene for a BBC play The Pistol Shot in the Theatre 625 series, and used Bowie with a dancer, Hermione Farthingale;[23][24] the pair began dating, and moved into a London flat together. Playing acoustic guitar, Farthingale formed a group with Bowie and bassist John Hutchinson; between September 1968 and early 1969 the trio gave a small number of concerts combining folk, Merseybeat, poetry and mime.[25] Bowie and Farthingale broke up in early 1969 when she went to Norway to take part in a film, Song of Norway;[26] this had an impact on him, and several songs, such as "Letter to Hermione" and "Life on Mars?" reference her,[27][28] and for the video accompanying "Where Are We Now?" he wore a T-shirt with the words "Song for Norway".[29] They were last together in January 1969 for the filming of Love You till Tuesday, a 30-minute film, not released until 1984, intended as a vehicle to promote him, featuring performances from Bowie's repertoire, including an as yet unreleased "Space Oddity".[30]

The studio sessions continued and resulted in Bowie's third album, The Man Who Sold the World ,1970 , which contained references to schizophrenia, paranoia, and delusion.[39] Characterised by the heavy rock sound of his new backing band, it was a marked departure from the acoustic guitar and folk rock style established by Space Oddity. To promote it in the US, Mercury Records financed a coast-to-coast publicity tour in which Bowie, between January and February 1971, was interviewed by radio stations and the media. Exploiting his androgynous appearance, the original cover of the UK version unveiled two months later depicted the singer wearing a dress: taking the garment with him, he wore it during interviews – to the approval of critics, including Rolling Stone '​s John Mendelsohn who described him as "ravishing, almost disconcertingly reminiscent of Lauren Bacall" – and in the street, to mixed reaction including laughter and, in the case of one male pedestrian, producing a gun and telling Bowie to "kiss my ass".[40][41] During the tour Bowie's observation of two seminal American proto-punk artists led him to develop a concept that eventually found form in the Ziggy Stardust character: a melding of the persona of Iggy Pop with the music of Lou Reed, producing "the ultimate pop idol".[40] A girlfriend recalled his "scrawling notes on a cocktail napkin about a crazy rock star named Iggy or Ziggy", and on his return to England he declared his intention to create a character "who looks like he's landed from Mars".[40]

1976–91: Berlin era

Bowie moved to Switzerland in 1976, purchasing a chalet in the hills to the north of Lake Geneva. In the new environment, his cocaine use decreased and he found time for other pursuits outside his musical career. He devoted more time to his painting, and produced a number of post-modernist pieces. When on tour, he took to sketching in a notebook, and photographing scenes for later reference. Visiting galleries in Geneva and the Brücke Museum in Berlin, Bowie became, in the words of biographer Christopher Sandford, "a prolific producer and collector of contemporary art. [...] Not only did he become a well-known patron of expressionist art: locked in Clos des Mésanges he began an intensive self-improvement course in classical music and literature, and started work on an autobiography."[74]

Tin Machine's first world tour was a commercial success, but there was growing reluctance—among fans and critics alike—to accept Bowie's presentation as merely a band member.[104] A series of Tin Machine singles failed to chart, and Bowie, after a disagreement with EMI, left the label.[105] Like his audience and his critics, Bowie himself became increasingly disaffected with his role as just one member of a band.[106] Tin Machine began work on a second album, but Bowie put the venture on hold and made a return to solo work. Performing his early hits during the seven-month Sound+Vision Tour, he found commercial success and acclaim once again.[107]

1992–2016: Electronic period

Reuniting Bowie with Eno, the quasi-industrial Outside ,1995 was originally conceived as the first volume in a non-linear narrative of art and murder. Featuring characters from a short story written by Bowie, the album achieved US and UK chart success, and yielded three top 40 UK singles.[115] In a move that provoked mixed reaction from both fans and critics, Bowie chose Nine Inch Nails as his tour partner for the Outside Tour. Visiting cities in Europe and North America between September 1995 and February the following year, the tour saw the return of Gabrels as Bowie's guitarist.[116]

In late March 2011, Toy, Bowie's previously unreleased album from 2001, was leaked onto the internet, containing material used for Heathen and most of its single B-sides, as well as unheard new versions of his early back catalogue.[143][144]

In May 2015, "Let’s Dance" was announced to be reissued as a yellow vinyl single on 16 July 2015 in conjunction with the "David Bowie is" exhibition at the Australian Centre For The Moving Image in Melbourne.[165]

Acting career

Biographer David Buckley writes, "The essence of Bowie's contribution to popular music can be found in his outstanding ability to analyse and select ideas from outside the mainstream—from art, literature, theatre and film—and to bring them inside, so that the currency of pop is constantly being changed."[169] Buckley says, "Just one person took glam rock to new rarefied heights and invented character-playing in pop, marrying theatre and popular music in one seamless, powerful whole."[170]

Bowie took the title role in the Broadway theatre production The Elephant Man, which he undertook wearing no stage make-up, and which earned high praise for his expressive performance. He played the part 157 times between 1980 and 1981.[93] Christiane F. – Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo, a 1981 biographical film focusing on a young girl's drug addiction in West Berlin, featured Bowie in a cameo appearance as himself at a concert in Germany. Its soundtrack album, Christiane F. ,1981 , featured much material from his Berlin Trilogy albums.[174] Bowie starred in The Hunger ,1983 , a revisionist vampire film, with Catherine Deneuve and Susan Sarandon. In Nagisa Oshima's film the same year, Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence, based on Laurens van der Post's novel The Seed and the Sower, Bowie played Major Jack Celliers, a prisoner of war in a Japanese internment camp. Bowie had a cameo in Yellowbeard, a 1983 pirate comedy created by Monty Python members, and a small part as Colin, the hitman in the 1985 film Into the Night. He declined to play the villain Max Zorin in the James Bond film A View to a Kill ,1985 .[175]

Musicianship

From the time of his earliest recordings in the 1960s, Bowie employed a wide variety of musical styles. His early compositions and performances were strongly influenced by rock and rollers like Little Richard and Elvis Presley, and also the wider world of show business. He particularly strove to emulate the British musical theatre singer-songwriter and actor Anthony Newley, whose vocal style he frequently adopted, and made prominent use of for his 1967 debut release, David Bowie ,to the disgust of Newley himself, who destroyed the copy he received from Bowie's publisher .[19][181] Bowie's music hall fascination continued to surface sporadically alongside such diverse styles as hard rock and heavy metal, soul, psychedelic folk and pop.[182]

Bowie was known as a multi-instrumentalist. In addition to his playing of guitar, keyboards, harmonica and saxophone, he played stylophone, viola, cello, koto, thumb piano, drums, and percussion.[188][189][190][191]

Legacy and influence

Bowie's innovative songs and stagecraft brought a new dimension to popular music in the early 1970s, strongly influencing both its immediate forms and its subsequent development. A pioneer of glam rock, Bowie, according to music historians Schinder and Schwartz, has joint responsibility with Marc Bolan for creating the genre.[192] At the same time, he inspired the innovators of the punk rock music movement—historian Michael Campbell calls him "one of punk's seminal influences". While punk musicians trashed the conventions of pop stardom, Bowie moved on again—into a more abstract style of music making that in turn became a transforming influence. Biographer David Buckley writes, "At a time when punk rock was noisily reclaiming the three-minute pop song in a show of public defiance, Bowie almost completely abandoned traditional rock instrumentation."[193][194] Bowie's record company sought to convey his unique status in popular music with the slogan, "There is old wave, there is new wave, and there is Bowie ..."[195] Musicologist James Perone credits him with having "brought sophistication to rock music", and critical reviews frequently acknowledge the intellectual depth of his work and influence.[192][196][197]

Bowie was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1996.[117] Through perpetual reinvention, he has seen his influence continue to broaden and extend: music reviewer Brad Filicky writes that over the decades, "Bowie has become known as a musical chameleon, changing and dictating trends as much as he has altered his style to fit, influencing fashion and pop culture."[198] Biographer Thomas Forget adds, "Because he has succeeded in so many different styles of music, it is almost impossible to find a popular artist today that has not been influenced by David Bowie."[199]

Discography

David Bowie ,1967

David Bowie (also released as Space Oddity ) ,1969

The Man Who Sold the World ,1970

Hunky Dory ,1971

The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars ,1972

Aladdin Sane ,1973

Pin Ups ,1973

Diamond Dogs ,1974

Young Americans ,1975

Station to Station ,1976

Low ,1977

"Heroes" ,1977

Lodger ,1979

Scary Monsters And Super Creeps ,1980

Let's Dance ,1983

Tonight ,1984

Never Let Me Down ,1987

Tin Machine ,1989

Tin Machine II ,1991

Black Tie White Noise ,1992

The Buddha of Suburbia ,1993

Outside ,1995

Earthling ,1997

'Hours...' ,1999

Heathen ,2002

Reality ,2003

The Next Day ,2013

Blackstar ,2016

Filmography

The Man Who Fell to Earth 1976 as Thomas Jerome Newton; received Saturn Award for Best Actor

Just a Gigolo 1978 as Paul Ambrosius von Przygodski

Christiane F. 1981 cameo as himself

The Snowman 1982 narrator in re-released version

Baal 1982 as Baal

Yellowbeard 1983 the sailor wearing shark fin – The Shark

Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence 1983 as Maj. Jack 'Strafer' Celliers

The Hunger 1983 as John Blaylock

Jazzin' for Blue Jean 1984 as Vic and Screaming Lord Byron

Into the Night 1985 as Colin Morris

Labyrinth 1986 as Jareth the Goblin King

Absolute Beginners 1986 as Vendice Partners

The Last Temptation of Christ 1988 as Pontius Pilate

The Linguini Incident 1991 as Monte

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me 1992 as Phillip Jeffries

Dream On 1991 as Sir Roland Moorecock

Basquiat 1996 as Andy Warhol

Gunslinger's Revenge 1998 as Jack Sikora

Everybody Loves Sunshine 1999 as Bernie

Mr. Rice's Secret 2000 as William Rice

Zoolander 2001 cameo as himself; nominated for MTV Movie Award

The Prestige 2006 as Nikola Tesla