

George Michael: 'If I never make another record again, I'll be happy!'

On the eve of The Deeper Faith tour, George talks of the inspiration behind his extraordinary new album



Simon Hattenstone

Its two years since I was last at George Michael's house. Since then he's done time. Had his career written off by most music critics. Been mentored by Simon Cowell. Scooped the awards at the MTV music night. And now he's about to tour the world, with an album that has received more critical plaudits than the rest of his work put together.

As George opens the door to greet me, he seems leaner than previously. Healthier too. This fresh bout of success appears to be agreeing with him. He presses a glass of early Christmas sherry in my hand and asks me to wait in the living room, whilst he finishes a session with his personal trainer.

He bounds back into the room ten minutes later. The energy George, I ask him. You seem revitalised.

He laughs throwing his head to one side, as if exercising his neck. 'I'm incredibly happy Simon to be honest. And lucky I guess. I'm working out twice a day at the moment. Tony (Maniema), my trainer is working me incredibly hard. But I'm loving every second of it, truth be told. Loving it'. He exaggerates the L of loving, sounding uncannily like Strictly's Craig Revel Horwood.

'Deeper (Faith) has given me a new lease of life. It was an album I had always hoped to make but never knew how'. What do you mean?, I ask him. 'Well, to make Deeper, I had to go to a place in myself that I guess I've never really tapped into before. Certainly not musically. I found my inner voice again I guess you'd say'.

You only have to listen to the album once, to know exactly what George is talking about. It's a piece of work that grabs you. But not up-front by the throat.



Photograph: Andrew McPherson

It hits you deep. Like all great art does. And as you listen to it again and again, it takes hold of you and doesn't let go. Songs you have to go back to, like medicine for the soul.

What affect did prison have on you? 'Well it was a wake up call that's for sure. I had nothing to do but think. Think and sleep. And I guess in those moments I came to certain realisations'. About what, I ask? 'About me. My life. Things that had happened to me and why they happened?'

But to be honest Simon, they would have remained just thoughts without Mr Cowell'. Yes Simon Cowell. The man at the controls of the 21st century pop machine. An unlikely alliance?

'Simon's great. He came to me after I'd been inside, and set up the TV interview with Jonathan. To be honest it was just the boost I needed. I've always had self-belief, but Simon somehow takes you to another level. You seem really grateful to him, I say. 'Well when someone believes in you they way that Simon does, then you realise what you've got and what you can still do. So really the two things, Simon and my spell in prison were

intertwined in helping make the shift to make Deeper.'"

But more than that, I knew if I was going to record again it had to be meaningful for me. I had to feel that I was opening up new frontiers in myself.

George's phone rings. 'Sorry Simon, bear with me'. He takes the call in front of me. 'Hey David how are you'? Turns out to be Golden balls himself wanting a couple of VIPs for the LA Forum gig on New Year's Eve.

How do you feel it compares with your other work, I ask him. 'I firmly believe that it's the best record I've done. I put more blood, sweat, and tears and love into this one than anything previous. It reaches out even deeper and in more directions than the others did.

Is there a theme to A Deeper Faith? 'The theme is renewal of the spirit, the human spirit more than the spiritual or godly spirit, the human spirit fighting for its voice. It probably reflects the maturity that I've experienced with the realisations I had both in prison and when I came out'.

I want to stay longer and talk to George. Almost be in his presence. It's not a fan worship thing. But he exudes a worldliness that I've not seen before. A calmness, almost serene. An artist who has come of age.

As I stand to say my goodbyes he stretches out his hand to shake mine, and looks me firmly in the eye. 'Just know one thing Simon' he says. If I never make another album again I'll be happy. A Deeper Faith is me. This is who I am deep down'.

And with that I'm out into the London afternoon. I'm feeling happy. Not for me. But for George. He's an artist who has rediscovered his muse. A Deeper Faith is the perfect remedy for lost souls and yearning spirits. Cherish it.



A Deeper Faith World Tour begins on Dec 27th in New York, and concludes in March 2012 in Sydney.

George Michael: 'This is the album I always wanted to make.'