

## Alex McEwan

The Scottish singer/songwriter returns with a brand new album.

Depending upon your musical persuasion, you may consider David Bowie's 2013 album, *The Next Day*, as the greatest comeback album of all time. Perhaps U2's *Achtung Baby* would be at the top of your list? Or how about Take That's *Beautiful World*?

For those of you who may be undecided, there's a new possibility to consider. Almost twenty years since the release of his debut album, *Beautiful Lies*, Alex McEwan is back with his latest compilation, *In a World We Don't Know*.

"I decided to call the album that because of recent events," Alex says, referring to the Covid pandemic. "We don't know what's going to happen in this world, things can just turn. And I guess there's another twist in it because it can be a beautiful world as well."

Beautiful is certainly a word I would use to describe his songs. Prior to our chat, I'd been listening to the second single from the album (the first being the title track) and I tell Alex how much I'd enjoyed 'Hold Your Hands Out to Me'.

"Yeah, I like that song but, well, I wrote it!"

Just like his music, Alex is instantly likeable. He has an easy, down to earth manner about him. And let's face it, not many people would write about mushy peas!

"I was sitting down one day and I thought, I need to include that line about mushy peas!"

We both laugh, but you need to hear it to appreciate it. I ask Alex about his songwriting and whether or not it comes naturally.

"Well, it does and it doesn't. It's trying to wait for the inspiration rather than force it. But then again... recently I was talking to someone who said, 'Why don't you go and write a radio hit?' I went upstairs next day with my guitar and... I just wrote a song. It's actually turned out to be one of the best songs I've written. It's called '**It's Gonna be All Right**'. It's a strong one."

When I ask how his new music differs from his earlier songs, he responds: "It might be a bit more reflective. It's slowed down a wee bit in tempo. I think perhaps my ability to write lyrics has changed... the lyrics and structures of songs come to me a lot more."

Going back to the beginning, Alex tells me about his early years in Glasgow: "As a kid, we had a piano in our house and I always remember getting an accordion. There were five children and we all had different musical tastes. Our parents were very into their music, so there were lots of reference points in terms of albums to listen to."

Those albums included Johnny Cash and Bruce Springsteen, both influential when it came to his own chosen genre of Americana and associated Jazz, Blues, Folk and Gospel.

At 13, he began to play the guitar, later mastering both the electric and acoustic versions.

“In my early twenties, my mother died and my grandmother died at the the same time. The guitar almost became a source of comfort to me. That’s when I really started writing songs.”

After a period of club gigs and busking, Alex took a chance and flew to Nashville, the result of which saw his debut album really take off. Back in the UK, he toured with Katie Melua, performing in front of crowds of up to 10,000. His last ‘proper’ gig was at Shepherd’s Bush Empire but, like many musicians, the need to earn a regular income forced his hand.

“I lived in my mate’s room,” he tells me, recalling the difficult decision to call it a day. “I had very little money... so I focused on doing the things I hadn’t done for the last few years, you know, getting a house and some financial stability... and I got married.”

He tried teaching and engineering before switching to banking, but his musical ambitions remained.

“I started to realise that I just wasn’t happy in this world of financial services. I could do the job... but it wasn’t fulfilling me and I found myself picking up the guitar and writing songs.”

In fact, he wasn’t just writing them, he was dreaming them!

“I was waking up dreaming about songs - *my* songs on the radio. I woke up thinking, I wish I could remember that song. So I started to get into it more again. I started to learn classical guitar, and I started on the singing again and the writing. But actually the trip on the cruise ship really started to focus my mind.”

He’s talking about a Caribbean cruise he enjoyed with his wife in 2019 when he sang ‘Sweet Home Alabama’ at an open mic night. That song, incidentally, was the first song he ever learned to play on the guitar. The response he received following that impromptu performance inspired him to pursue his dream once more.

“I felt inspired again. I moved to the Kent countryside. I grew up outside Glasgow in the countryside and that helped me write again. That’s how I got back into music.”

*In a World We Don’t Know* was written during lockdown and includes ten songs all penned by Alex. It’s due to be released on 28<sup>th</sup> September but the first three singles (the most recent being ‘Rodeo Star’), are all available to be streamed.

At the time of our conversation, Alex is also looking forward to supporting The Shires in Glasgow on 28<sup>th</sup> July. His smile is full beam as he tells me about it. He might live in Kent but it’s clear he considers Kelvingrove Park as a home gig.

“I grew up in Glasgow. I was born in the city but then grew up just outside in Bishopbriggs. I spent a lot of time in Ayrshire as well. My grandmother was from Auchinleck. I used to spend an awful lot of time going to Auchinleck as a wee boy.”

Back to present day and Alex is juggling his music career with his job in finance, recognising the need to earn a living, but refusing to give up on his singing aspirations.

He refers once more to his support gigs with Katie Melua: “That was a really good buzz and that sticks with you when you leave. I got a very good reaction, people loved it. That tells you that you shouldn’t give up on your music.”

Despite his success in the early days, Alex is somewhat surprised by the response to his new music.

“I’m still struggling to believe that I’ve managed to get back in with some success again. In many ways I can’t believe I’m back doing it... that I managed to write songs that I think are credible and I really like. It’s stuff that I feel proud to have written. That to me is a great thing, to come back and do that again.”

The official video to the single ‘In a World We Don’t Know’ is a perfect example of Alex doing just that. Not only does it showcase his singing and songwriting talents, it also highlights his expertise with the guitar and harmonica. As for the final track on his album, ‘On Top of the World’, does that just about sum it up for Alex?

“The thing for me is to have a decent sized audience come to watch me, that’s the big dream. A secondary dream to that would be to have an album that hit the charts... that’s the dream.”

The best comeback album of all time? Possibly.