

t h e a t e r

# The Boys are back in town

*Taboo* writer Boy George and Euan Morton, the actor who plays him in the new-to-Broadway show, dish about Rosie, romance, and the media **By Michael Giltz**

**D**on't call it a comeback. Boy George is a world-class DJ, designs clothes, and has done his own radio show and newspaper columns, all while creating one album after another, whether it's dance projects like *The Twin* or solo albums like 2002's overlooked acoustic gem *U Can Never B 2 Straight*. So if his hit West End musical *Taboo*—about life in the '80s for a hardworking drag queen—gains him new attention when it hits Broadway, it's just because we're catching up with Boy, not because he was left behind.

"If only life were as simple as it's played out in the media," says George,

who sits down for a chat during rehearsals with costar Euan Morton, both of them dressed casually, with George sporting a T-shirt that reads IT'S ALL ABOUT ME. In a rather mind-twisting bit of casting, Morton (in an Olivier-nominated performance) plays the young Boy George, while George plays legendary queer performance artist Leigh Bowery. The story follows a youthful Boy George making his way in London, led by the pied piper of nightlife, Philip Sallon, and balances itself against the career of Bowery. Other characters include real-life figures, like George's tragic drag pal Marilyn, and composites of other people in George's life, such as Culture Club

drummer (and George's ex) Jon Moss.

Above all, unlike most U.K. pop musicals—which are built around old pop songs by ABBA, Madness, and the like—this show features an acclaimed batch of new songs, including "Stranger in This World," "Talk Amongst Yourself," and "Ich Bin Kunst." "My mum, obviously she went to the workshop and wept from beginning to end—even the happy bits," says George. "This is the happy bits!" "I know, but it's so sad!" There were lots of people crying. When Euan does 'Stranger in This World' [a song about being different], there's a lot of mums that cry. And a lot of queens that cry. And a lot of queens and their mothers that cry together."

George is also writing two more songs for the Broadway show to emphasize the rise-of-a-pop-star story line being fleshed out in an all-new book ▶



Euan Morton and Boy George—  
as Boy George and Leigh Bowery;  
(inset) Morton out of makeup

written by Charles Busch. "The things people write about me," says George. "I was reading stuff yesterday: 'Vanished Icon.' Oh, that's a new one. I think people have to have these kind of simplistic ideas of what you are, where you are. You tend to become your career. You become your sexuality. You become your color. You become your job. No, that's not true of any human being, do you know what I mean?"

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—Boy George*

But it is true that the path to Broadway has been a fairy tale. Even after opening in London to strong reviews (especially for George's score and Morton's performance), even after a 16-month run and four Olivier nominations (including Best Musical), Broadway might have remained a "distant dream," as George once imagined it, until a certain former talk-show host fell in love with *Taboo*. "Rosie [O'Donnell] came to London and in her magnanimous way said, 'I'm takin' this to Broadway!'" recalls George, laughing. "It's like, 'Cheers!' But I never thought I'd see her again. Lovely American woman promises me the earth." But as the show's producer, O'Donnell delivered, shepherding the show across the Atlantic—and Boy George with it.

George and Morton are obviously chummy—not surprising, after George gave a boost to the box office by appearing in the show in London for five months. They share bites of each other's food, and Morton even snags a puff when George risks the law's wrath by having a cigarette, admitting he's been smoking in the bathroom for ages.

"I should have known it was you," says Morton, a 26-year-old Scottish lad who politely declines to describe his private life. A rising star in the United King-

dom, Morton has some good stage credits (including a workshop production of a musical version of *Queer as Folk*), but this is by far his biggest break yet. And for George, despite the steady work over the years, it's proved to be a creative rebirth as well.

"I have written and recorded so much in the last few years," admits George, 42. "I have enough for three albums. I woke up while I was doing *Taboo*. And through *Taboo*, I kind of developed the idea of doing *The Twin*. The songwriting is about one-night stands and things I wouldn't normally write about. 'Electro Hetero' was about a one-night stand. In fact, it wasn't even about a one-night stand. It was about two hours. But the penis was so colossal, I had to write something about it."

Euan: "I didn't know you wrote songs about penises. I rather like that."

George [*singing*]: "Brother, Rick, you weren't joking / You really had me choking.' It's subtle!"

Even though he's been smoking in the boys' room and facing the discipline of showing up every night for a performance ("not always on time"), George has also learned a few lessons. "I've learned doing the show that you can't always get your own way," he notes, laughing. "No matter how much you scream." Such as? "There are things that I would probably change in the script. Costumes that I would probably make bigger. We're doing OK on that, and we've agreed that once everything is made, if there are things we want to add, I'll stamp my feet and we'll get them made. And there is a reluctance on Rosie's part to show too much aggressive sexuality. Which, in a way, I understand, because it's the very thing that stopped Leigh from reaching his potential as a performer."

George increasingly thinks labels like gay, straight, and bi are useless. And if it seems like in the '80s we took 20 steps forward, now he sometimes feels "like we've taken 20 steps back. You've got shows on TV like, 'Let's make straight people look more gay.' No, love, that's the whole point. We like them when they look like they can fix our radiators." ■

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