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MARK ALSOP: MORE THAN JUST THE MUSIC

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A year since winning an Honour Award for tirelessly supporting LGBT organisations, groups and events for more than 25 years, veteran DJ Mark Alsop continues to inspire with his music, community work and positive outlook. By Serkan Ozturk.

Synonymous with the “four-on-the-floor” party antics of the house music boom of the 1980s, Mark Alsop is now widely regarded as a stalwart of the Sydney gay scene. From a single mix tape sent to Club 45 on Oxford Street in 1984, his reputation quickly spread and in time he was not only headlining gay dance events but also playing at some of the world’s greatest clubs on the international party circuit. As he bravely reveals to SX however, the 49-year-old DJ renowned for his pumping remixes also happens to be a survivor, having been diagnosed with HIV many years ago. And he credits “the music” with helping saving his life so that he could inspire others.

“In 1984, AIDS was the topic on everyone’s lips,” Alsop tells SX.

“Mysterious and deadly and our friends were dying all around us. The fact that I myself was told that I had two years left at most rattled me to the core.

“Upon trying to deal with this ‘death sentence’, I gathered my courage and music and headed off to Club-land to try and lift people’s spirits and give them hope within the confines of the clubs.”

In the face of such a terrifying prognosis, Alsop threw himself into the role with gusto and passion, eventually playing a various roles in Sydney’s gay dance and club scenes. Indeed, there he was recently as part of The 80s Are Back exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum while German website HotDiscoMix.com has Alsop listed as “one of the world’s best remixers and deejays”.

Despite the many accolades earned over his career, Alsop says one of his most cherished achievements was being named the winner of the Media, Arts and Entertainment award at last year’s ACON Honour Awards.

“I was elated that people continued to throw their full support behind me to give me the chance to be given this award ... and that made it even more special for me,” he says.

“I couldn’t believe that the weight of the community and my peers were saying thank you. As a DJ, it’s a career that doesn’t see much in the way of thanks. I certainly never expected to be thanked, just going about my business to make the world a brighter place.”

One gets the feeling though that Alsop is selling himself short. For a long time he has donated his time and skills to front benefits and events for groups such as The Luncheon Club, ACON, Pride, Twenty10 and many others.

“I’ve also been known to rattle the BGF collection tin across the city and suburbs,” he admits.

“I can’t deny that I have had a long-standing commitment to the community and this may have had a lot to do with winning as well.”

Having lived and worked on Sydney’s gay mile for three decades, Alsop

is perhaps well placed to discuss the changing nature of the Oxford Street strip which he believes has become more mainstream as greater numbers of straight punters flock to the area.

“Although I am saddened with the state of what we have today, there are still a few gems amongst the rubble,” he says.

“I believe that those places that we have today, on and off Oxford Street, are facing such troubling times that it is essential that we support them wholeheartedly.

“If we don’t throw our weight behind these venues we may only have social media left and we will all be left standing in the streets holding our iPhones and how boring would that be?”

As much as he remains a keen student of musical history and the past, Alsop continues to keep his feet firmly rooted towards the future; spending countless hours every week practicing the use of new digital technologies and constantly on the lookout for that next great vocal line, beat or melody to sample.

“Though I have good memories with vinyl, I don’t deny that it scratched, it ‘popped’ sometimes so loudly that it made your heart jump into your mouth and some pressings were less than adequate,” he explains.

“It was heavy and cumbersome and dealing with some of the venues stylus was quite a nightmare!

“Today I love the use of CDs and USB, which has no encumbrances on the sound, quality or art form given the new CD players released.”

Reflecting on what’s continued to motivate him, Alsop pinpoints that moment all those years ago when he came face-to-face with the very real prospect of dying.

“It is this part of history that I still bring to all my gigs.

“I myself survived against all the odds and am living testament to the power of positive thinking,” he says proudly.

“I ground myself in the belief that I am here today for a reason, and that

is to continue to entertain and give hope to those that may lose their way.”

For more about DJ Mark Alsop, visit <http://www.markalsop.com/>

[Pictured] Mark Alsop. Photo: Ann Marie Calilhanna

COMMENTS (2)

STEPHEN BLOMFIELD

19 August 2012 at 18:13 | #

What a true gentleman Mark Alsop is. Has been since the day I met him way back in the mid 80's. His life venture effectively beating the HIV virus is a story worthy of a film script. I tip my hat to you Mr Alsop, what a legend. My only disappointment is this ... According to my recollection, Mark despite his pedigree, has never had to honour to play at a Sydney Mardi Gras dance party, and until that situation is rectified then that is a topic that must be placed into a shame file on the front desk at the organisers of Sydney Mardi Gras.

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LEXIE BRADFIELD

15 August 2012 at 09:08 | #

The very Humble Mark Alsop. The mountains (plural) he has scaled reaching the other side all the while maintaining his wonderful disposition. Mark has worked tirelessly at his craft in a sometimes very thankless industry. I've been very fortunate to have worked along side him and consider him Royalty in the DJ world. Written with love and respect Lexie Bradfield.