



dear john

Q A

How do I go about creating and marketing a unique image for my act?

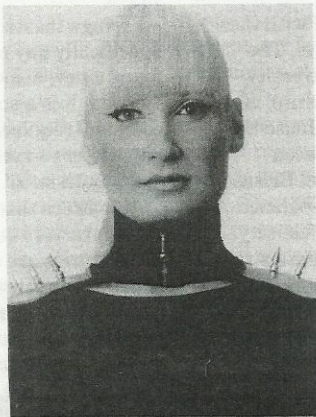
Of all the questions asked in this column, this is one of the hardest to give a single, comprehensive answer to. It is only common sense to study what other successful people in your field are doing and see if there are any lessons you can learn from them. However, unless you are deliberately aiming to create a tribute act, the danger with modelling yourself too closely on a particular solo performer or band is two fold.

Firstly, no matter how good you get at copying what they do and how they present themselves,

you are always going to be perceived as just that – a copy. Secondly, if a performer is truly an innovator, by the time everybody starts imitating them, they have already reinvented themselves and are doing something else.

Our two guests this week have excelled in the fields of opera and mentalism respectively, but have wanted to the push boundaries further. While their new directions may be unique to them, their reflections on how they found their way may help you discover what is unique to you.

what the experts say...



ÁLI

ÁLI describes her sound and image as rooted in tribal culture and her Scandinavian background, inspired by her love and respect for the planet, and driven by her belief that everyone has the inner strength to be their own 'warrior of love'. After a transformational journey she is ready to share her own music, with the release of her debut single Cocoon.

"I have never taken the straightforward and easy road. I thrive on challenges and am only encouraged more by the word 'no'. I played the saxophone at 12 and the clarinet professionally at 16. I also took up singing, all the while suffering severely from insecurity and never feeling comfortable in social environments.

"It was only when I got on stage for the first time with just my voice and the raw emotion of the character that I began to feel at home. Developing the ability to sing both opera and pop – each standing vocally on their own – has probably been my hardest challenge to date. It was in the face of endless people telling me to 'stick to what you're good at' and it involved leaving my

fan base and support network and starting again in a country and industry which knew nothing about my past work. I looked inside of myself and began asking who am I and why did I get into performing in the first place. I even bought a sewing machine and began designing and making my own costumes.

"I never expected to receive such positive feedback from both my old fans and my new audience. My previous career was mainly live based so it has been amazing to work digitally and see how it can connect with people all over the world. I could even ask my fans to choose the cover art for the release of Cocoon – that's just amazing."

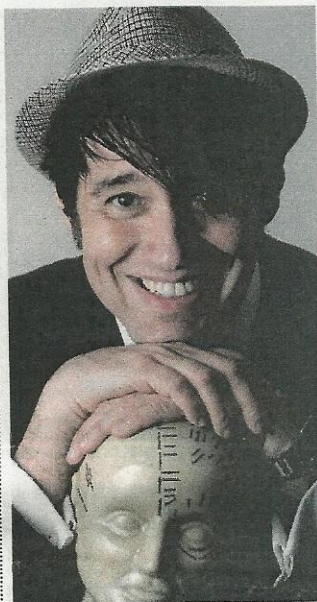
Doug Segal

Doug Segal has been described as "a new kind of psychological entertainer combining comedy with seeming feats of mind-reading and mind control". His 2012 show *How to Read Minds and Influence People* was a hit among audiences and critics alike garnering a wealth of four and five star reviews and winning awards at both the Edinburgh Fringe 2012 and the Brighton Fringe 2012.

"I was studying psychology and it occurred to me I could take some of the principles I was being taught to win drinks from my friends and impress women.

"After I'd started working in advertising, learning about statistics and persuasion techniques extended the range of my party pieces, leading to a corporate client bullying me into doing a show at their global sales conference. That went so well that I booked a two week run at Baron's Court Theatre [in west London]. Everything took off from there.

"Initially I was very influenced by Derren Brown and most of my



GIORGIO GARFALLO

my act from his and realised that being funny was a big differentiator – so I made a conscious decision to really focus on that. I enrolled in a stand-up comedy course and I only stopped doing stand-up at the point where I'd got good enough to be getting regular paid gigs. Then I started focusing on making the mind-reading act more of a blend of comedy and mind-reading. I'd often find myself thinking, what would Derren do? Then I'd try to do the opposite. If he'd tackle 'demonstrating how to implant a suggestion' in a serious, Mephistophelian way, I'd do it with funny hats and the entire audience singing *Waltzing Matilda*. The second leap forward was turning the whole trope on its head and showing the audience how it's done.

"The latest show is really a leap into completely unknown territory. No one has ever combined sketch comedy with mind-reading and an actual story arc before, let alone in a show where all the mind-reading is done by a random audience member. But I felt that if I didn't move forward, I'd be going backwards."

work was corporate, after-dinner shows, but I was really unhappy with how my act was. I sat down and looked at what skills I had that would allow me to differentiate

dear john sums up...

As ÁLI notes, taking your own direction in music or any other field is liable to lead to some degree of opposition. There is a degree of resilience required to keep going regardless, but it is also important to be aware of the difference between sticking to your own ideas and not being open to anyone else's.

Taking on board the target audience's feedback on new tracks and sleeve designs is not only an effective means of making sure your personal vision is marketable, but the 'buy in' it attracts from your fans is an important marketing technique in itself.

Doug's philosophy of "whatever Derren would do, I will do the opposite" is also a good one, proving that no matter how much one performer may be associated with a genre, there is a way to play your own part in the field as a contemporary, not merely a copy.

John Byrne is an entertainment industry career adviser. Details of career advice sessions, workshops and copies of *The Right Agent Right Now* ebook are available from www.adviceforperformers.com. ÁLI may be contacted via www.facebook.com/UniverseofALI, and Twitter @UniverseofALI. Her debut single *Cocoon* is available from iTunes. Doug Segal's new show *I Can Make You a Mentalist* will be at the Warren, Brighton, on May 24, and 25 prior to a run at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August. Details from www.warrenvenue.com