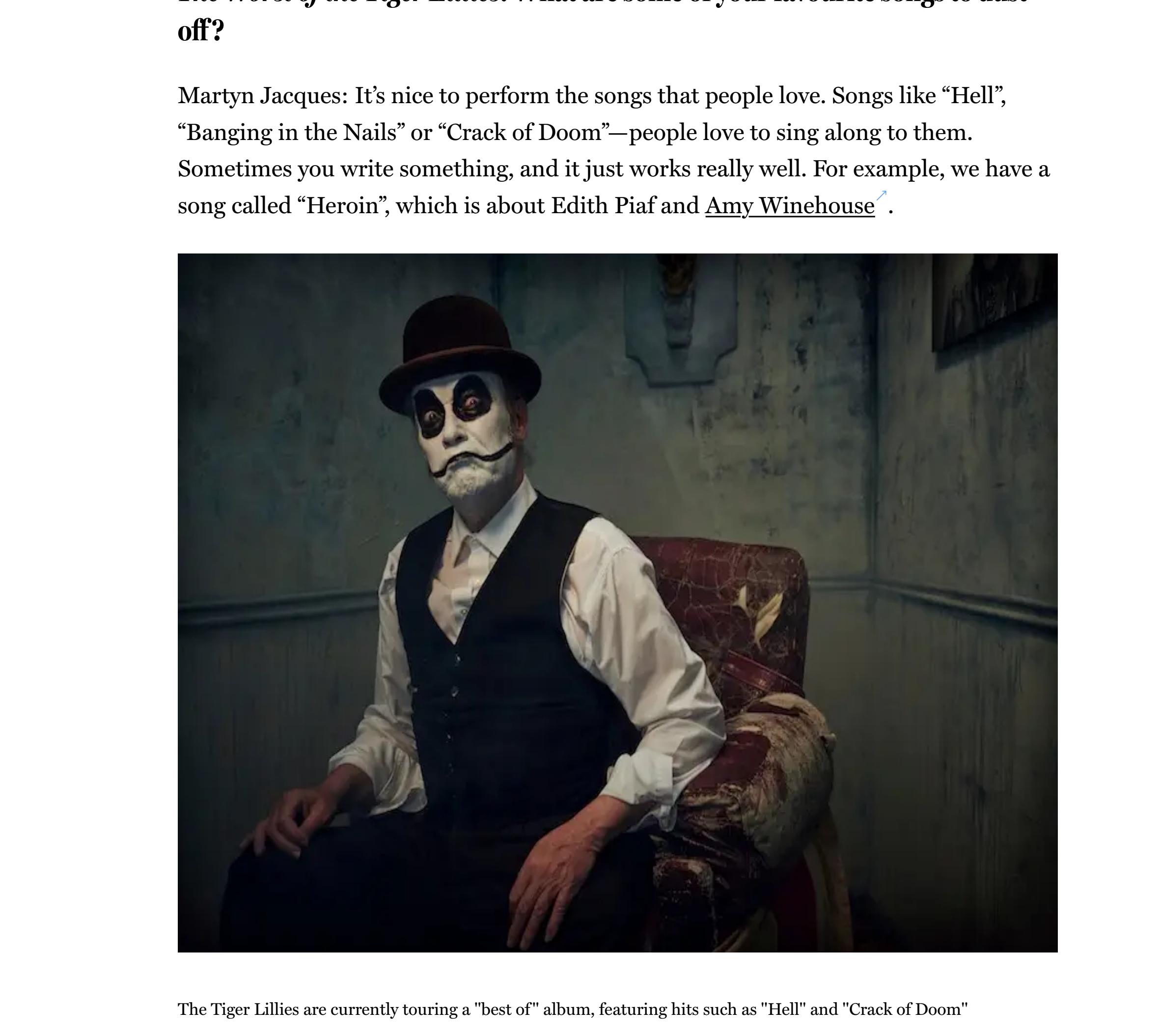


Martyn Jacques of The Tiger Lillies: "Offending people is part of my job"

BY READER'S DIGEST

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Martyn Jacques¹, the frontman of the legendary punk cabaret pioneers [The Tiger Lillies](#)², talks Ukraine, offending people, and what classifies as "success".

Reader's Digest: You're currently touring the UK with your "best of" album, *The Worst of the Tiger Lillies*. What are some of your favourite songs to dust off?

Martyn Jacques: It's nice to perform the songs that people love. Songs like "Hell", "Banging in the Nails" or "Crack of Doom"—people love to sing along to them. Sometimes you write something, and it just works really well. For example, we have a song called "Heron", which is about Edith Piaf and Amy Winehouse³.



The Tiger Lillies are currently touring a "best of" album, featuring hits such as "Hell" and "Crack of Doom".

Neil Young wrote this song called "The Needle and the Damage Done"; he said that this is a song about all the heroin addicts that could have been great musicians but never made it because they started taking heroin. Well, my song is almost taking the piss out of Neil Young, because it says, "If you want to win, take heroin", because there's lots of people that have actually not only become really famous, that took heroin, but also, it was part of their success. The journalists would write pages and pages of stuff about their addiction and about their suffering. Obviously, it's a bit humorous.

RD: You have about 40 albums under your belt. When you look back on your career, do you see it in specific chapters and eras? Or is it more of a natural progression?

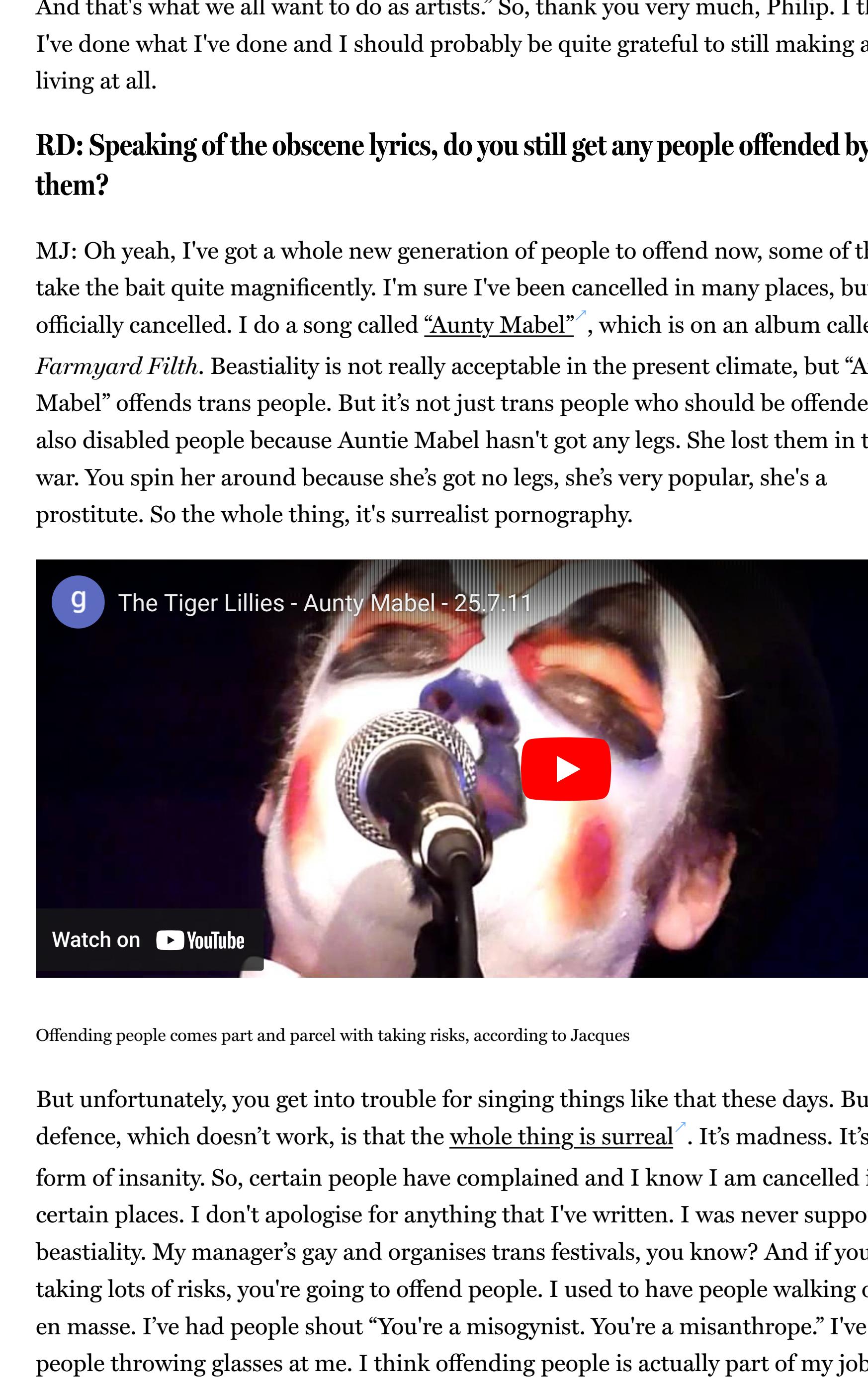
MJ: I think both, really. I can remember a time when we played in bars. And the music we made was influenced by the fact we were playing in bars. I can think of times when we were playing in theatres⁴, and the music we played was actually influenced by the fact that we were playing in theatres, the actual songwriting was influenced by it. Because if you're playing in a theatre, you can play with dynamics; whereas if you're playing in a bar, you have to scream, really.

RD: Which of those two mediums do you prefer?

MJ: There's no preference. We used to play in [King's Head in Islington](#)⁵. The stage was so small, the bass player had to stand on the floor. And the PA was something from the 1970s.

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But I can remember sitting there at the end of one night, and the entire floor just started shaking, because people—there were about 150 of them—were all stamping on the floor for an encore. I thought, Wow, this is amazing. I might not be playing [Wembley Arena](#)⁶, but, you know, this is success.



There are benefits to both a ruddy bar and a more subdued theatre performance.

But then sometimes I played in a theatre and I played a ballad on a piano, and there was complete silence. And you could see that people have cried, and you've moved them. That can be really magical as well. You have to make the best of whatever situation you're in. And I think if you're a good musician, you can create magic in either situation.

RD: Your relationship with your fanbase is a really unique one—there seems to be this kind of tacit mutual understanding there. Would you agree? How would you describe it?

MJ: Well, it seems to be getting a bit more affectionate, actually. I think people have started looking at me, and thinking, He might be not around much longer. I'm starting to get the sympathy factor. I'm probably getting softer as well. I like people more than I used to, because I used to be quite mean in a kind of a theatrical way. Like I'd walk on stage, and I'd be really grumpy and snarling. These days, I sort of tend to even acknowledge the claps.

RD: Are there any particularly memorable fan encounters?

MJ: The things that tends to touch me the most is when we get [Iranian people](#)⁷ come and see us. Ukrainians as well. They tend to touch me a lot because I have a real feeling of sympathy for them. It's a really horrible thing to have an oppressive government, not feeling any kind of freedom at all. And so I feel a particular sympathy for them.

RD: If I'm not mistaken, you'll be one of the first artists to perform in Ukraine since the war broke out⁸.

MJ: Yeah, I think so.

RD: What does that mean to you? Is there anything that you hope your show will bring to the Ukrainian people?

MJ: I hope that we have a nice time, that we'll make them happy for an hour or two. I guess they'll join in the chorus of one of our new songs, which goes "We'll be so happy when you die", and everybody shouts "die, die". It's obviously about Putin, so I'm sure that they'll sing it. I mean, what else can you do? I'm an entertainer, I entertain people, and give them a happy time.

RD: I noticed you've been quite vocal about the war in Ukraine on The Tiger Lillies' social media channels. Are you directly involved in them?

MJ: I'm directly involved with it. I've had a real adventure with Facebook. For me, the whole thing about Ukraine, it's not political, it's just compassion. There's all these people there and these monsters are killing them. I'm just doing it because I'm a human being. I've been viciously attacked by certain groups, like the communists and socialists.

"When you think about someone like Noam Chomsky supporting Russia in his statements, I can't be a socialist anymore"

I used to be a socialist; when I played in [Syntagma Square](#)⁹ when Greeks were protesting about Germany and the money they were being forced to pay, I used to support the socialists. But I got to a point where I can no longer call myself a socialist. When you think about someone like Noam Chomsky supporting Russia in his statements, I can't be a socialist anymore. I haven't gone right-wing, but I'm not a socialist.

RD: Is there anything that you look back on with regret in your career?

MJ: I played in Prague¹⁰ a while back, at this wonderful little bar—it was packed. And this rock promoter came over to me and said, "I would like to help you; I feel sorry for you playing in this little bar". I didn't say anything, maybe if I'd told them down a bit. But I played it like it is. I just did a wonderful concert, and the place is full. So it's a bit like, what you know what? I suppose, I should have done it on my shoulder, sometimes saying, "You know what? Martyn, you should have done it on my shoulder, sometimes I wanted to make you into a star".

"I remember thinking, I've just done a wonderful concert, the place is full. So it's a bit like, what is it?"

I suppose certain business decisions I've made weren't very wise because I've had opportunities to win awards and my hon'—maybe if I'd told them down a bit. And I did some half of them are obscene in one way or another. So maybe I frittered away my talents? Savit to the same "what, what's Martyn's definition of success"? I remember Philip Glass¹¹ saying to me, "What do you do, Martyn? It's nice, you tell everybody that".

I've done a song called "Aunty Mabel", which is on an album called [Mabel](#)¹². It offends trans people. It's not just trans people who should be offended, it's disabled people because she's got no legs, she's very popular, she's a prostitute. You spin her around because she's got no legs, she's very popular, she's a prostitute.

RD: Speaking of the obscene lyrics, do you still get any people offended by them?

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