

# David Bowie looks ahead

By PETE OPPEL

**A** SHIRTLESS DAVID BOWIE stretched out on the grass on the campus of Southern Methodist University just outside McFarlin Auditorium to soak up some sun.

He had spent the last week in strenuous rehearsal sessions for his tour — a tour that will bring him back to Dallas Monday for a concert at Memorial Auditorium. This was one of his few breaks, one of the few chances to get some sun since his arrival from Europe the week before.

David Bowie has been a busy man, recording his own albums, producing albums by others, completing a movie called "Just a Gigolo," painting, creating.

He lay prone for a few minutes, then sat upright, lit an English cigarette and decided to talk and answer questions.

**Are you an official resident of Berlin now?**

No, no, I just go there a lot.

**You are recording there?**

Yes and I did my last film there — it was set in Berlin. I escaped it, but I had to get back to it.

**How long will this current tour last?**

Four and a half months including Europe.

**Of that 4½ months, how many days a week will you be actually performing?**

At least seven, possibly eight. There's very few days off.

## Getting back to Europe

**That's a awfully strenuous for someone who has announced he was retiring from the road.**

I've announced that four times actually. Everytime I reach the end of a tour I swear it will be the last time.

**Then why do it again?**

Because I want to reach everywhere including Europe. Usually I haven't been doing Europe and I enjoyed it so much the last time two years ago which was the first time ever. So to keep Europe in this time makes it a very long tour.

**How did you get involved in the film "Just a Gigolo"?**

That was very fast. I was told about it a week and a half before it started shooting. A lot of people were called in at the last minute. I think it was pretty well thrown together. I really don't know the background of it too well, but David Hemmings wanted me to play the part and he had just been brought in as director. So we just got together awfully quickly and started work immediately. All the pre-production stuff had been done, but the actual selection of the cast came together very speedily. So I think there was a little gamble to it.

**When you were asked to do the part, did you know your co-stars were going to be Kim Novak and Marlene Dietrich?**

Novak I knew about, but Dietrich was sort of a silent rumor. No one believed she'd actually do it.

**What made you accept this script after you had turned down so many other offers following "The Man Who Fell to Earth"?**

Hemmings I've always admired tremendously as an actor. I liked him very much. I thought the story was quite interesting because it's an aspect of Berlin that hasn't been covered that much. You usually see the cabaret side of Berlin. This is about a middle-class family and how they coped with the changes that happened after the first world war. They more or less prostitute themselves to survive. So I thought the subject matter was quite interesting and it was Hemmings himself who talked me into it. I was doubtful whether my interest could be held through it, but he came over to see me and we talked all night long, not only about "Gigolo" but about the aesthetics of films, and we got on rather superbly and I was quite willing to put myself in his hands as a director.

**Why did you turn down the other scripts?**

They were all about little green men with funny things growing out of their heads or rock 'n' roll stars — the inevitable cliché parts one would expect whose past connections were with the rock 'n' roll world.

## No little green men

**You've developed characters on your records so the transition from records to film couldn't have been that traumatic.**

Theatricality, of course, played a large part in my records, especially the early ones, although not so much these days. The initial creation of the first three or four characters involved it. But even with the stage production I'm completely in control. In films you put yourself in someone else's hands. And it's a position I'm not particularly used to. I keep wanting to put my tuppence worth in. I do enjoy the discipline, and the knowledge one gains from that environment is very important indeed.

**Do you have any ideas for a film you'd like to direct?**

I have several, but I'd rather not talk about them. I'd rather gain my confidence and know exactly what I'm doing before I start vocalizing my ideas. I don't like to say things and not do them. I'd rather do them and say "So there you are, it's done."

**How differently did you approach the "Gigolo" role than your part in "The Man Who Fell to Earth"?**

The character I play in this movie is much more of a real person. The guy is absolutely, hopelessly vulnerable. He's utterly helpless — not very good at doing anything actually. He doesn't get it quite right. Even as a gigolo there's something very awkward about him. He's just struggling through to keep his chin up, be respected and be awarded the dignity he feels is due him as an ex-officer in World War I. It's a comedy as well and that makes it a whole different kettle of fish. And that's another reason I wanted to do it because I wanted to do a comedy. It's light comedy, sort of an English comedy.

**Have you ever thought about combining your acting and concert activities and doing a play?**

Yes, in fact, I've been offered something. I may well consider it. It's for next year. It's fairly classical theater. I'll have to look at myself and talk to myself about it to see if I really have the confidence to do it.

**Where would you do it?**

New York.

**In your first picture you were the star. This time around you have to share billing with Kim Novak, Marlene Dietrich and Maria Schell.**

It's a lot more rewarding working with others. Maria Schell, for instance, and David — working with them was super. I think it helps one's performance.

**Did these screen veterans regard you as the brash newcomer?**

No, they were absolutely fabulous to work with — incredibly helpful. Maria, particularly, took me under

her wing and guided me and gave me an awful lot of incentive and motivation.

**How did your recent collaborations with Brian Eno come about?**

That was a very fortunate meeting. I met Brian originally about seven or eight years ago about the time he was falling back to music and we got on awfully well. But from that point on our careers took very different turns. Basically, I was on the road most of the time and he was on the road so we didn't meet very much really. And after getting the whole idiocy of the rock 'n' roll thing out of our systems, we came together again in England and decided we wanted to do something. So we started talking about what we would do if we were starting all over again. So we went and started all over again.

**Was this desire to "start all over again," as you put it, the reason you went from the soul sound of "Young Americans" to the sound you and Brian created on "Low" and "Heroes"?**

It was that plus a number of other things. A complete change of environment always does a writer good because you can write yourself dry just living in one area. There's a couple of areas in America and I had exhausted myself in the environment around them. So I decided to switch environments and that came into it a lot. The environmental change played a large part in the stylistic change of my material. I needed to go back to Europe and become a European again. When I got back to Europe it dawned on me how American I had become.

**Does that mean neither "Heroes" nor "Low" could have been recorded in America?**

Oh no, quite definitely not. No. One thing that rarely influences me is other people's music. There are idiosyncratic artists that I enjoy listening to, but the majority of rock and what's on radio doesn't affect what I write. I tend to write far more about the environment and about the areas indigenous to the one I live in. So the same pressures and the same frictions one finds in Berlin are not apparent here.

**You say other people's music doesn't influence you, but I have detected, especially in your early recordings, Anthony Newley influences.**

Oh, very much so in the very early days. I had this splendid idea of amalgamating what he had done to the musical with rock 'n' roll to make some kind of hybrid. That was an original conception. Of course, one becomes one's self eventually and develops one's own style. But I certainly used him as a starting point. He was a very good starting point. He was a man of a lot of potential in the very beginning, but he quickly got burned out. He got into that dreadful Los Angeles scene — Las Vegas and all that — and it defeated anything he might have done.

**You seem bitter about L.A.**

I loathe it. I had a very bad time there. It's not a pleasant environment when you're in that particular station in life of being a celebrity who attracts an awful lot of freaks (laughs) — which at that time I certainly was. So I was totally surrounded by all kinds of bionic personalities and it turns one's head a little. So I had to make a fast



David Bowie: "The environmental change played a large part in the stylistic change."

retreat from that place eventually. It really burned me out.

**You say you are influenced by your environment, but your songs dwell on future environments. What exactly do you see in our future environment as it may affect everyday life?**

Yes, I do look at the future, but I think a writer has at his disposal his own experiences and those of acquaintances and friends around him upon which he draws, according to the kind of scenario he wishes to write. I don't think I can be that simplistic about how things are written and put together. I certainly don't want to broadcast any particular movement or statement. I think it's very hurtful to a writer. I much prefer to throw out obscure comment rather than a straight forward statement. It leaves open so many avenues for mental illustration.

**You are a painter, a writer, a musician, a rock star and an actor. What one word would you use if asked to list your profession?**

I'm a generalist. Brian and I talked about what on earth we were doing because Brian is a similar person. He's a great scientist himself — he really studies it hard — and he's a cybernetics freak. Generally music for both of us is merely a valve system for letting out all the influences and ideas of other subjects that we're interested in. I don't think either of us are very interested in the world of rock 'n' roll because I think that would limit our writing tremendously. And it really isn't a very interesting world either. So I guess generalist is the best description.

**Are you planning any more collaborations with Brian Eno?**

We're working on a third thing and we're thinking about this mixed media thing that we might stage at some point. But it's at least two years away.

**Why did you change your name from Jones to Bowie?**

At that time I obviously had to forget David Jones (because of Davy Jones of The Monkees). I'm not sure how I picked it, but I always liked the idea of the Bowie knife because it was double edged and, in itself, very ambivalent. I wanted a name that was very subtly ambivalent and Bowie was obscure enough.

**You have a reputation for elaborately staged concerts. What's your Dallas show going to feature?**

Rather a letdown compared to that sort of thing. It will be more like the last tour — pretty basic. Again it's just white lights.

**Your remarks and stories about you have made your private life as public as your public life. Have you regretted any admissions you've made or statements about your private life you've made public?**

No, I don't regret much of anything I've done. I just work with things the way they are. One puts oneself in those positions and one has nobody to fall back on except oneself. What's happened has happened and I am what I am right now because of it, whether it be good or bad or whatever.

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