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Sean Alexander
Seattle University

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After the Show: Dean Lewis

Sean Alexander, Director of Photography

What's been your song of the week?

You want an honest answer? The honest answer is I mainly have been listening to my songs. So the song of the week, right now, I'm literally getting my next album mixed... So right now I've got a new song that I'm not gonna say the name of, but I've been getting it mixed this week. So I spend most of my time, sadly, not being able to, enjoy a lot of other music.

It's mainly just listening to my future songs that I'm finishing. So it's an unreleased song right now that is my song of the week.

No, I think that's great. I appreciate the honesty with that. The internet kind of said that "Waves" was what propelled your career back in 2016. Would you agree with that?

It was the first song I released and I'd written a lot of songs before that, but I didn't wanna release anything. It was pre TikTok. So back in the day, my whole strategy was, wait till you find the song, the magic song, and put that out. I remember I put it out and it did nothing for around three months. It got no support from anyone back home. And then all of a sudden it was on this show called "Riverdale," a big show on Netflix, and it was on the midseason finale or something, and it blew up and then all of a sudden it had a million views on YouTube, and I started getting fans and I just thought what the hell's happening?

I would've probably quit if that song didn't work because I'm one of those people, where I need something to work. If it doesn't work and it doesn't show progress, I would've moved on. You know what I mean? So I'm glad it worked.

Did you end up releasing any of the songs you wrote before "Waves"?

Oh, yeah, I had written "Be Alright" like six months before that. I had a manager at the time. We were like, this song is a hit and it actually was a hit and we all thought it was a hit at the time. Although I couldn't get a record deal, I was playing it at all the showcases and no one, no one, like, they just would go, all the record labels in Australia were like, oh, cool, but we don't get it.

And some of the other songs like "Lose My Mind." I had "Half a Man" written already. Which is another big song I've had. But I knew they weren't the first songs to be put out. I wanted to put a song out that was different at first, but could also be huge. "Waves," to me, was unlike anything I'd heard before. It captured attention when I played it to my friends and family.

How would you say that your earlier music compares to the single you just released?

I would say that I wouldn't write a song like "Waves" now because I think at the start when I wrote that song, I didn't know what I was doing at all. The chords in that song are so weird. There are almost too many sections in it. It's, it, it is very strange. I think there was a magic in that when you're first starting and you don't know what you're doing.



Sean Alexander

Dean Lewis performs at the Neptune Theatre.

The new song I've put out, "Trust Me Mate" If anything, it's similar to the stuff that I was putting out at the start, and maybe it's more simple and more focused.

I would say if you go further into the thing that you are doing, you create a signature sound. Whereas, everyone's always like, just try something completely different every time. I think you gotta bring it 5% forward, but keep it to your signature sound. There's a perfect balance that I'm trying to achieve, I haven't found it yet, but I'm trying.

How do you quantify that your music is in fact you?

I know when it sounds like me, I know what I sound like. Selfishly I write the music I like, I write the songs for me, not for anyone else. They're about my life, and I write them because I wanna listen to them. And when I write a song that I like, I listen to it hundreds of times before I release it. I also hate it because it's stressful because I want the music to be great.

I go through phases, but that's also a taste thing. I think when I say something sounds like me now, I think there are a couple of things. First of all, it is about something that means something to me in my life. Two it stylistically sounds like me. I think as a singer-songwriter, it's really hard to find a style. I mean, look, if you zoom out, singer-songwriter with an acoustic guitar and a piano, there's a million of us.

How, how do you define the sound? I believe I have found my sound, and if you listen to a couple of songs of mine, you can recognize it. I have a song called "Heartless" and then "Trust Me, Mate". They both have this sort of spoken word style on over emotional piano chords, it's not rap, but it's not singing in a conventional sense. I would say it's a signature sound that I'm trying to develop. It's really important to find the sound and also to keep it evolving in small percentages each time. Because as a singer-songwriter, it's so hard to have a unique sound.

If you play a song on the piano, how do you have a sound? But I think I've found my little pocket. I'm also just following what I'm excited about. And that may change and I may completely get away from that in a year, but for the last six years, that's what I've been focused on.

Your songs, "How Do I Say Goodbye," which is about your father, and "Be Alright," which is about advice from your brother. Both are deeply personal things to you. How do you feel about how much that resonates with fans who are brought to tears at your concerts?

It's incredible. I remember when I was writing, "How Do I Say Goodbye" I was so emotional. I was crying. I never have that reaction when I'm writing a song, sometimes I have a, oh god damn, I feel that tingle. Like, oh that's an emotional feeling there. Or a feeling of, oh, this is going to connect. Early on I put the song out called "Half A Man" and the line was, "How am I supposed to love you when I don't love who I am?" And I wrote that on my own and I had this feeling of the hair on the back of my neck standing up.

During the show, he mentioned how they had to look it up and make sure he wasn't plagiarizing because he couldn't believe he was the first one to write the lyric.

And I thought can I say that? Is that a bit too deep? Are people, are my friends gonna tease me? Are they gonna be like, that's cringe?

Whenever I get that feeling now, because that song connected and I saw the reactions from fans, I'm like, oh go into that feeling of vulnerability because that's what connection is. That's what makes the songs connect.

I think it's incredible. I think at my shows it's different now because I used to just write obviously sad songs, but now "How do I say Goodbye" It's a different level. People have lost someone they love and this song speaks for them and, it's incredible at the shows, I'm privileged to do it.

During the show in Seattle at the Neptune Lewis brought a fan from the audience to sing the song with him.

I knew it was special because when I had my hit song "Be Alright" five years ago, I remember people would come up to me and they would just start telling me about their lives like they knew me. They'd go 'I had a girlfriend,' or 'I had a boyfriend who cheated on me, and I saw the messages'. And then with "How do I Say Goodbye" People would come up to me and they would say, 'I lost my brother,' or 'I lost my dad' they were telling me their most personal stories from the day I started playing it till... which a year was a little bit over a year ago till now even. It's a really special feeling, it feels incredible.

I also feel a little bit guilty as well. Although I wrote the song about my dad. My dad ended up being okay. I wrote the song assuming I was gonna have to say goodbye, and I didn't have to. My dad got a stem cell transplant and his cancer was an aggressive form of pre-

leukemia, and he had a very small percentage chance of getting out of it. And he just got lucky with this stem cell transplant and it worked on him. It doesn't work on everyone.

I didn't have to experience what other people had to, so I feel a little bit guilty. But I feel very special that I've helped so many people.

In writing a song like that, it's tied into something very emotional. How does writing a song like that help you as well as all these other people?

I just knew it was the time to write the song. I write about things that are happening in my life, and this had been happening with my dad. But it was happening when everything was blowing up for me and my dad's been my biggest supporter. And so, this was happening and I was waiting for when I had to come home. I'm gonna have to get on a plane and fly home at some point because he was looking like a skeleton and he was in and out of hospitals. And then I just got to a point where I had to write about it.

I remember I was in Nashville, I was with my friend John, we wrote "Be Alright" together, and I got to his house. I was like, 'It's time, let's write a song about my dad.' It was the moment to write about it. I don't know, it was just bubbling away in the back of my mind.

Last few questions. You released a few singles from your third album, which is on the horizon. Is there anything you'd like to say about what to expect from this third album?

So I think I made a couple of mistakes on my second album including taking too long. I'm so thankful for, "How Do I Say Goodbye" because if that song didn't come out and, and connect with so many people, I wouldn't even be putting out a third album. I think it would've probably been over (laughter). I've learned from my mistakes by taking too long. I'm moving quicker. I've just written a lot more songs about my life. I'm trying to write more songs that have meaning. I'm not holding back as much. I guess that's what I could say. But I'm just really excited about it and I'm almost finished with the album and I can't wait for people to hear it.

Awesome! I saw your video on Instagram, of you walking and singing with people after a concert. How is the tour going, how have your fan interactions been?

Oh mate, it's amazing. When I was here last time in America, it was just after COVID. Before, I would sell out all my shows. When we came back a year and a half ago it was half full and I'd never had that. I was like, holy shit is it all over? Did I miss my boat? And then, "How Do I Say Goodbye" blew up and all these shows are now all packed again. I'm so thankful. I come out after every show and I either will get photos with everyone individually or will come out sometimes and play a bunch of songs outside the venue. I'm just so thankful and grateful. I'm from Australia, you know, we sold out the Seattle show so I'm like, I'm gonna play to 1,200 people in Seattle, that's insane. So I want to come out and see the people's faces I did that last time I was on in Seattle as well, but now I wanna go out and just, just to say thank you it is a minute for me, but it's a moment in some people's lives and you know, it's like them telling me, how songs help them, it's only a second for me, but it helps a lot of people and I just wanna say thank you.

I'm not taking any of this for granted because I know that this might be my last tour in America. You never know if you're gonna have another hit song. I'm gonna keep trying, but I just appreciate it so that's why I go out.

Last two questions, if you were to pick one of your songs to play for someone who's never heard your music before, which one of your songs would you play for them?

How many would you want me to play one, two, or three?

If you wanna gimme the top three you can.

Well, I would play "Be Alright," "How Do I Say Goodbye" and "Waves."

Lastly, is there anything else you'd like to talk about regarding music, life, the tour, really anything going on right now?

Life's good, man. I'm super appreciative of everything that's happening and it's just been awesome!

Are you or someone you know a musician or involved in music? Do you like to talk about your music? Well, email sean@spectator.com to potentially be featured in After the Show.

