

Jack Docherty – meeting Bowie was “a lot of fun”

We can meet our heroes – just for one day.

Jack Docherty will return to his home city of Edinburgh for three performances of his Edinburgh Festival hit show David Bowie and Me: Parallel Lives this month.

Before he is back on our screens as Chief Cameron Miekelson in Scot Squad, Docherty is taking the show around Scotland, across the water to Belfast and down to London where Suzi Ronson, the wife of Bowie’s Spiders From Mars guitar player, Mick Ronson, and currently the author of the bestseller Me and Mr Jones, is rumoured to be making an appearance.

Jack takes us back to Edinburgh in the early 1970s and his obsession with David Bowie. The young Hibs fan would soon be adding Bowie posters alongside his football heroes.

He said: “I had a mix from both sides of my interests, in the spectre of cool I had David Bowie at one end and Pat Stanton and Alex Cropley at the other. I liked glam, punk and prog music but Bowie was my obsession”.

He would see Bowie live as the much-loved Ziggy Stardust character along with The Spiders From Mars in 1973 at the Empire Theatre, now the Festival Theatre.

Jack said: “It was the greatest time to see your hero live.

“When I listen back to Aladdin Sane now, I still have to play the whole thing, it’s such a masterpiece from start to finish but that whole 1970s Bowie run of albums is just incredible,

his work schedule must have been brutal as he produced so much great work”.

The Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars concerts were famous for Bowie’s numerous costume changes, audiences should also expect a few changes from Jack during the show. He said: “I wear a Japanese kimono like the one Bowie wore in 1973 and feature my photographs doctored with me as Bowie in the little one-piece knitted jumpsuit. I mean it was weird how he could wear the most ridiculous things and still look cool. I joke about the bass payer (Trevor Boulder) looking like a plumber jammed into a silver suit. The only Bowie look I didn’t like was the one in Labyrinth (1986) as the Goblin King with the (heavy) metal hair”.

Jack admitted that pop hits such as ‘Starman’ and ‘Life On Mars’ were among his favourites. During a school trip to London, Docherty managed to see Bowie again just three years later. He said the music was “somewhat beyond him at the time”. He said: “I was in London in 1976 when Bowie was playing at Earls Court (to support his album Station to Station). That tour never made it to Scotland, the music was very dark and experimental, we all loved the pop stuff at the time but now I love all the experimental stuff. I think his last album Blackstar is one of the best things he ever did”.

Bowie made it back to Edinburgh a decade after the shows at the Empire Theatre. Docherty’s stories of seeing the famous Murrayfield Stadium concert raised some of the biggest laughs of the evening at last year’s festival. “1983 was a very different experience”, he said, “that was such a huge crowd in Edinburgh. I was with Moray Hunter, (Docherty’s co-star in the Channel 4 cult series Absolutely that ran between 1989 and 1993), who had damaged his knee playing football and was on crutches. He was waving at Bowie right down the front all the way through, he must have wondered who this guy was waving his crutches around at him”.

While Docherty was a big fan, his grandfather and father were not so much. "In Edinburgh, it was a constant war" he explained, I was told not to have long hair, my grandfather would take me to the barber in Carrick Knowe and say "Doon tae the wid" (cut it short). We would wear flared jeans and Afghan coats but it was so different from what went before with the likes of Frank Sinatra or The Beatles."

They say never meet your heroes but Docherty countered the point with a story about when he met Bowie as his special guest on The Jack Docherty Show. Bowie was promoting his Earthling album at the time back in 1997.

"When I met him he looked very cool, we had a strong rapport and a lot of fun actually, he hung about afterwards. Bowie was in a good place, very happily married and was doing what he wanted musically. He could have done bigger chat shows but I think he wanted to do the show as we were the new kids on the block at the time, he just wanted to have some fun. That's why I always say: 'Meet your heroes' because you never know".

What about that 1970s Bowie record collection, did Docherty keep his vinyl? "I've got all my records and a couple of posters, most of the posters didn't survive the test of time but I've kept all my albums and they are worth a bit in good condition... it's worth keeping them".

Jack Docherty in David Bowie and Me: Parallel Lives is at The Traverse 16-18 May.

