

German pop singer Eto talks with IN Los Angeles about being inspired by Muppets, the making of his synth-tastic debut album, *Plastic Poetry*, and being bi-curious.



Poetry in Motion

BY KEN KNOX

Eto didn't get his inspiration to be a songwriter from any of the usual sources. Instead, the German-born performer discovered the joy of songwriting from none other than Jim Henson's Muppet characters. "I was very young watching *The Fraggles*, and the main characters explained that everybody has got his own song inside," the singer explains. "That day I created my first bad song."

It makes sense that a kids show about colorful puppets served as the inspiration for Eto's work. His songs—electronic-based confections that he describes as "80s synth-pop meets the zeitgeist of the present"—are fused with a playfulness that often eludes many pop singers today, despite often being steeped in melancholic topics such as heartbreak, alienation and sexual longing. Take, for instance, the lyrics from his upcoming single, "Bicurious," a track dedicated to enlightening men in the ways of sexual experimentation: "Maybe you will leave me/Or maybe you will stay/Lay your hands upon me/Don't think of being gay/I'm sure that you have dreamt of/The kiss

from the mouth of God/If you're open-minded/Boy, just get it off." If ever a song encouraged "play," surely "Bicurious" fits the bill.

Recorded as a rebellion of sorts against societal oppression, the risqué song gives sexually curious men a context in which to explore their inner homo. "There are many boys and men who would like to try some same-sex experimentation, even if they are not really gay, but because of society and ostracization they are afraid to check it out," Eto explains. "I want to reassure them not to care what people say and maybe give it a try." Of course, Eto also acknowledges that there was a bit of personal motivation involved, as well. "I've got some sexy hetero friends who behave and look very metrosexual. I always wonder if they would like to try some new experiences."

Found on Eto's upcoming debut album, *Plastic Poetry*, "Bicurious" is one of several songs inspired by the young performer's travels in the sexual wilderness. A collection of songs written and recorded in his home studio during the last two years—a period that, Eto says, "wasn't really the happiest time in my life"—*Plastic Poetry* is nonetheless a heartfelt and enjoyable throwback to a simpler time when musicians used music solely as a vehicle through which to explore their demons—or just to have fun. "I was really tired of hearing the usual radio pap—all that R&B, hip-hop and rock, too many pretty, cast artists, pseudo-gangsters and fake rebel acts. It's all about image, look, publicity and prestige. I wanted to bring the good old '80s pop back in a modern dance mixture."

It's music that some might regard as being somewhat vacuous, but Eto finds a way to give each song meaning—hence, the title *Plastic Poetry* was coined to sum up his first album. "I regard myself as a classic songwriter," Eto states, "singing simple songs about love, life, identity and insanity."

Though, at 32, Eto was but a babe during the heyday of


the '80s, he fondly recalls being a teenager growing up in the small German town of Kevelaer who would often spend all of his pocket money on the 7-inch vinyl records of his favorite artists, including Erasure, Jimmy Somerville and Bronski Beat, Pet Shop Boys, Depeche Mode, Kraftwerk, Björk and William Orbit. His father played guitar and a bit of keyboard, and Eto inherited some of that musical ability, first "bothering my parents playing badly on an old organ we had in the living room" before eventually convincing them to buy him a sampling keyboard when he turned 13. He sang in choirs in school, but it wasn't until many years later when he dropped out of the University of Cologne—where he'd been studying special education—to pursue a career in music that Eto finally realized the extent of his passion for music. "I always feel better when I'm singing," he says simply. "Most of the time my life is in chaos. To get it under control I try to process it into my music."

Though he recorded some of the tracks in German, Eto eventually decided to open the music up. "I think English sounds better with music," he posits. "And, more people around the world are able to understand what I'm trying to say."

Part of that message involves his sexuality, something that many told him to keep under wraps. "People told me that being openly gay could be a problem for the music business," he says. "But I am what I am, and I don't think I have to hide my sexuality to be a good musician. It's 2007—being gay should not be such a problem anymore, and I'm trying to get that across."

If such openness means that he fails to crack the Top 10, Eto says he is just fine with that. "Bicurious" wasn't meant to be a chart breaker," he says of *Plastic Poetry's* second single (a follow-up to the more ambiguous "Hideaway," an obvious homage to Erasure). "But I think it might make some waves in the underground."

"I don't have this big master plan," he adds. "For me, I'd just like to see what the future brings."

 *Plastic Poetry will be available this month from Creme Royale records. An EP is currently available on iTunes. For more information on Eto, visit www.myspace.com/etomusik.*

