

# Morel's moments

By Jerry L. Wheeler

Out gay rocker Richard Morel has had many great moments, from co-writing and co-producing three tracks from Cyndi Lauper's *Bring Ya Back to the Brink* ("Same Old Fucking Story," "Raging Storm" and "Set Your Heart") to DJ'ing his famous Blowoff parties in Washington D.C. to his own solo albums. His latest effort, *Death of the Paper Boy*, is a dark two-disc gem that he describes as "11 new songs about the things that bring you down." What attracts him to writing about the dark side?

"Well," he says with a laugh, "if you hung with me, you'd see I'm actually a pretty up person. All through my life, and I assume everyone else's, there's a sweep of emotions and an impact that happens as a result of a particular event, and a lot of times the details may be different but the effect is the same. Those kinds of heightened emotions are attractive to me as a writer, and I feed off them when I'm experiencing them. Tapping into those experiences gives my stuff a vitality it wouldn't have had otherwise."

"It's also kind of cathartic," he continues. "The reason I'm kind of chipper is that I've gotten it out of my system. The funny thing is that in the pop song context, it's almost easier to have a melancholy or sad song – like a Neil Young or Morrissey moment – because you only have three or four minutes. I don't know how you'd do comedy in that short a time."

The title cut from *Death of the Paper Boy* deals with a "moment when everything changes." What moment was Morel writing about? "When my dog died," he explains. "His name was Chief – he was 10 and a half years old and he was literally my best friend, People who aren't dog owners may not get this, but he was with me in the studio all the time and he was my best friend on the planet. I've lost family and I've lost friends, but for some reason, it seemed like everything got wrapped up in his dying. There are a number of events that can do that to you – all of a sudden, something can change on a dime and everything's different afterwards, but the thing that made me reflect on that was Chief's passing."

Collaborating with Cyndi Lauper had to be another one of those moments. "Working with her was incredible," Morel says. "She's really fearless in the studio and willing to go places where you may not think she'll go. It was so exciting for me as a writer to work with someone that willing to take risks and sing in a different way or push the timing or lyrically go another direction. And she's also a complete blast to hang out with. She's a really genuine person, really straight up – very fair. It was a real privilege to work with her."

One of the best tunes on his new album is a cover of an explicitly gay David Bowie song, "Sweet Thing," that wound up as an extended cut on the dance disc. "When I first heard that song as a kid," he states, "I didn't even know what a homosexual was. Well, I kinda did, but that song was about something that was obviously compelling to me. It's always been a touchstone for me. Sometimes when I'm at a loss about where to go, I think of that song. It's had a huge impact on me, and it really fit in with this record and what I was writing about."

And how does Morel write? "It varies, but the one consistent thing is actually doing it. I don't really sit around and wait for it to happen. I go downstairs and start working – you get up in the morning, have your tea and then go into the studio and begin writing. That doesn't mean all of it's good," he says with a laugh. "I have to write a lot of stuff that I'm not too keen on to write the song I like, so it's a process."

That process is evident when you listen to not only the guitar-oriented first disc of *Death of the Paper Boy*, but also the second disc of dance remixes Morel calls "shoegazer disco." "One of the best aspects of music," he states, "is its communal nature – you're playing a record and sharing it with everyone in the room, and they're moving with it. Being able to DJ and feed off the people and see where they're going and where you're going influences how I work on my records."

And his work pays off – just ask the paper boy. ■



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