



[Perfume Genius](#) (the stage name of one Mike Hadreas) is a pop artist with style, a queer icon for our time, and he's been creating intimate sounds with little more than a piano for years. His latest album, *No Shape*, sees a departure from the exclusively intimate sounds of the past, with lush instrumentation overflowing from each bite-sized track.

[Perfume Genius](#) will be touring Australia early this year, and will be hitting the [Adelaide Festival](#) on March 8.

[Radio Adelaide](#) Presenter Mark Tripodi interviewed Mike Hadreas in the lead up to his tour down under.

Mark: *Your work has had a dramatic shift from Too Bright to No Shape. Can you tell us a little about that? What's next for the Perfume Genius sound?*

Mike: Oh lord, I have no idea. I mean part of how I work is that I go in there I don't really come back out or really like any of the... when I go in there I guess I should say that I mean like to write.. I'm... I don't usually like it until it's something different or sort of scary for me like outside of my comfort zone so I don't really know what that is yet. I always think I... I always have things planned out before I go in to write and I'm always wrong... so... I keep thinking it's going to be country for some reason, it's gonna be, like, country

Mark: *I would definitely be interested to hear that. 'Otherside', the opening track for No Shape, sets the precedent for your whole album. Can you tell me a bit about how you decided "this'll be the song that'll open my album"?*

Mike: I like the kind of fake out of it because it sounds very much in the first like thirty seconds like things I had done before and like my first two albums, you know, and then it just suddenly breaks into something that's unlike anything I'd done before. And... I don't know I think that was kind of fun [laughs] I guess.

Mark: *Yeah, your work is normally – well it still is – but your work is very intimate and personal which is something that comes across in stripped back tunes, but No Shape is so full and lush. How was it this time around, reconciling the bombastic energy with the more quiet moments?*

Mike: I think I just have confidence now that I can put the same amount of care and thought into things whether they only have a few elements or a lot. I think since... like the first album was just a collection of the first songs I'd ever written so over the years I... I kind of don't feel anymore like I lucked into this or like an imposter or anything, I'm a little more confident that I'm good at it. So I feel like I can handle, you know, like fifty different elements and I'll be able to edit or whittle it down if that's what the song needs, you know? And I think I used to be so paranoid about adding too many things because I thought I would um I couldn't handle it, but I kind of went the opposite with these songs. I thought, really, just pile everything on and then either leave it or whittle away at it. And I feel like I kind of left it most of the time for this one. I don't remember what your question was now, but I hope that answers it.

Mark: *I think you did. Now 'Slip Away' and its film clip is full of the imagery that's both theatrical and romantic. And I feel like it became synonymous with the album and the images it conveys. Was there always a deliberate image in mind that you were hoping to present?*

Mike: Like visually?

Mark: *Yeah.*

Mike: Um. Yeah. I mean it always kind of shifts depending on who I'm working with and it becomes a whole new thing. Most of the stuff I was sending over to like the photographers and people that help me even style clothes that I was going to wear on the album cover and stuff like that were mostly like paintings and I wanted it to be very... paintings and like film stills of different like fantasy movies from the eighties. I wanted it to be like something underneath that was always dark. Like a lot of kids fantasy movies from when I was growing up like Neverending Story and Labyrinth that were really sweet and they're made for kids but there's some kind of undercurrent or something supernatural and occulty and just dark – at least to me – that I liked. And I wanted all the visuals to have that.

Mark: *I feel like that translates well into my next question which is talking about Kate Bush, who you reference in 'Slip Away' [sic] [recte 'Wreath'] who had film clips that were very I feel like they translated well to that imagery. Has she always been an influence on your work? Have we missed references before this?*

Mike: Um... I mean that was the only like deliberate one. There's probably, you know, I've been a fan of hers so it's probably just in there, rolling around when I'm just making anything. But what's kind of fun is that I kind of became a fan of hers more as an adult. I didn't really grow up with her music. I think I grew up more with people that were influenced by her, you know? And then I heard her as an adult and I was like "oh that's where a lot of that came from" or the beginnings of a lot of the things that I love, you know. So it's kind of rad. Plus with the dancing, I hate... for some reason interpretive dancing sounds so rude, it makes it sound like um... corny or something. I'm there for it, like I take it all very seriously, and I feel like I can kind of do a similar thing sometimes.

Mark: *Yeah it's absolutely very fun watching her film clips now. Now we talked about the intimacy of your music - do you find power by sharing the most intimate moments of your personal life? Is it difficult or does it come easy now?*

Mike: Um. I guess kinda both. If I really think about it, I get... I get shy, but I just don't think about it, and um, it's just how I've connected with people, you know? My whole life I've been basically trying to get people, like parents, whoever, to understand me, and um, you know it's a very teenager angsty thing and it never really ever works, but with the music, somehow it has and I feel people know exactly what I'm talking about. It's just a really good, really good feeling and one that I haven't had a lot, so maybe I got kinda addicted to it.

Mark: *Yeah, there was the essay that Owen Pallett wrote, also a renowned queer musician, he wrote about your album, one which I have quoted endlessly since I discovered it. How does the essay make you feel? Do you agree with what Owen wrote about you?*

Mike: Yes. I mean it's... reading... I mean I essentially wrote a lot of those songs because I don't really know how to talk about it in my daily life or in conversation, and I feel like a lot of what he wrote about them was exactly what I was trying to say, you know? And he was writing it in ways that I... you know, wouldn't have been able to explain myself, like to you or to somebody else asking about the song. Like, that was the only way I could do it. Then he kind of broke it down in a way that really made me tear up when I read it.

Mark: *Earlier this year you toured with Serpentwithfeet, how did that partnership happen?*

Mike: I'm just really into his music, essentially, is I just reached out. I was like I really like you, do you... and I think you're really good, do you wanna come on tour with me? Because he's incredible. At first I was kinda nervous having him play before me, because he's so good, but I just tried to think of it that he's in a different lane, you know, like he can be the best in his lane and I'll come out and be the best in mine. You know, I think there's some similarities, but he's different enough that I was super intimidated in the end.

Mark: *Yeah, having listened to some of his music quite recently I feel like it's a good match and a very fun match. Now, the production of No Shape is overflowing with all these extra little pieces of instrumentation, something that sounds really difficult to replicate live. How are you hoping to translate this live on stage?*

Mike: Well, I just got home from tour, um, we've kinda been touring the album since it came out in May. I think we're doing a good job. You know, there's only four of us at some point I'd like to make enough money that I could travel with like a whole choir and like a brass section or something but for now it's just four people on stage. And I don't need it to sound, I don't need it to have every single sound from the album as long as the energy and the... like... message of the song is still there, you know? I actually like that better at show when it doesn't sound exactly like the album, like pitch perfect, because I usually get bored. I would rather listen to, um... I'd rather just listen to the record on headphones. But, hopefully everybody else feels the same way. So I've been really into it, especially now, and I

think Australia, it'll be really good because I'll have some... I'll be like, rejuvenated, but still remember and have all the like, you know, ninety shows or whatever I just did under my belt with this album.

Mark: *Yeah, we're used to the intimacy of your music through headphones, but what is it like baring yourself on stage like that, night after night?*

Mike: It's intense, like, if I really think about it. It's a weird thing to get used to. Just like, it's a very strange job to have, and it feels like a job sometimes if I do it every day long enough. But I'm not... the job is essentially like trying to make yourself feel the least jobby ever. It's trying to lose control – what I try to do on stage I guess is just sort of have the most cathartic, like exorcismy feeling I can have with my body and – body and soul I guess. But, it's just a weird thing to do. I set aside an hour a day to go out on stage and just freak out and I'm super into it.

Mark: *So it's been a few years since your last tour to Australia – why now?*

Mike: Um. Because my new album's out [laughing] I don't know. I'd come back much more often if I could get over there.

Mark: *Yes, it's definitely expensive.*

Mike: I'm just glad that we get to go, you know? And I'm going to some newer places around, I'm playing some festivals and things I haven't played before, so, I'm just glad that that stuff keeps on happening.

[You can catch Perfume Genius at the Adelaide Festival on the 8th of March.](#)