



WHY DID 25-YEAR-OLD SINGER-

songwriter **Gregory Douglass** stay in the closet (at least professionally) for his first four albums? A drag queen told him to. "Vermont's leading drag queen, Yolanda, came up to me after a show and said, 'I just want you to know, I've never seen a gay artist with such potential. Play your cards carefully,'" explains Douglass, adding, "I figured if a drag queen is telling me not to come out, that's advice worth listening to."

One thing Yolanda was right about—Douglass has talent. Even before entering high school, he knew he wanted to pursue music professionally, so he chose to go to a boarding school "so that I could get the going-away-to-college experience out of the way." At his graduation ceremony, the headmaster told the audience that Gregory was the first student in his career that he advised *not* to go to college. After all, by this time Douglass already had two albums under his belt.

For a while it was smooth sailing as the musician kept recording, while also keeping his sexuality quiet. Then it all fell apart. His music partner left, and the label lost interest in him once it became clear that his success wasn't going to be of the overnight variety. Looking back, Douglass says, "For four years I stayed in the closet with the mainstream recording industry, doing what they wanted me to do, but I realized that if they weren't going to help me, I might as well do it myself."

He left the label, came out and, as he puts it, "decided to go the Ani DiFranco route." Gregory created his own label, Emote Records, and started "creating the music I want to, the way I want to." His latest effort, *Up & Away*, channels everyone from Stevie Wonder to Fiona Apple in a way that's terrifyingly mature for someone so young. And Douglass knows it. "I think it's good to tackle [making it as a musician] when you're young and have the stamina to put up with all the effort involved," he says. "Most of the people I meet on tours are a lot older than me. I'm very aware of the advantage I have."

Through the Internet, Douglass has forged a direct link with his fans, providing resources for "Greg Heads" to spread the gospel of Douglass as well as offering at-home concerts for those willing to turn their living room into a performance venue. He's also enthusiastically embraced the label "gay musician," saying, "With gay issues in the mainstream media, there's never been a better time to be an out musician." Running a label, performing on tour and creating new music keeps Douglass constantly busy, but he says "these days I'm actually very happy. I don't try to filter things out as much as used to."

—JAPHY GRANT

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