By ANDY BATTAGLIA

Justin Vivian Bond is a cabaret singer who commands the stage with a mix of glamor, menace—and gender. By way of original songs and pointed covers of pop classics, Mx Bond—"Mx" being the preferred honorific, in place of "Mr." or "Ms.," for transgender identification—mingles the art of monologue with music, to often delirious effect. The next such occasion will be Friday at the downtown club (Le) Poisson Rouge, in celebration of "Justin Vivian Bond's 600th Birthday Blowout!"


In advance of the birthday show—which will include musical accompaniment from friends Martha Wainwright, Thomas Bartlett and Murray Hill, among others—Mx Bond, who turns 50 on Thursday, spoke with The Wall Street Journal about abstracted math, the confines of gender conventions and the scent of history.

How does it feel to be turning 600?
Monumental, a real triumph, heroic! There are 600 months in 50 years. It's not as mundane as turning 50. I didn't have a concept of how many months it would be, and it feels like both a lot and not that many. It seems basically like what it is: a grain of sand in an abstraction.

Is it true what they say about the 500s being a particularly difficult time?

I found the 200s to be the worst. The 500s were a breeze, comparatively.

How are you marking the occasion at the show?

We're going to have a big old hootenanny. Right now I'm in a state of confusion as to what I want to sing, which is something I've never experienced before. I'm glad I have a moment to revisit what I've done in the past so I can focus on what I want to do in the future. It's one of those moments that coincides with this monumental birthday. I'm in a transitional moment, and it's exciting. I like that I can do whatever I want. I'm lucky that way.

Has hormone therapy changed your relationship to performing?

It's been about two years, and it's been very grounding for me. My body has really changed, so it's like I'm going through a second adolescence. I have to figure out how to negotiate my presence in the world like a lot of people do when they're teenagers. It's like I have a teenage body and a 50-year-old's mind. It's complicated but also fun. Everything seems to be more interesting for me if it's on more of an intimate scale. I feel like anything is possible at this point, which is a nice feeling—I've never felt that before. Taking control of my gender presentation and taking estrogen gave me a sense of wholeness that I never had and made for this potent moment for me. It's also a little intimidating: What am I capable of?

What does the therapy entail?

I take estrogen in order to make my body more in line with my transgender identity, the way I see myself. It's different for everybody, so that's just a medical choice. The fact of the matter is that I'm transgender. I don't feel like I'm either one [male or female], so I'm just trying to find the balance where I can look and act and live in the space that I feel is most authentically my own. I don't want to have to be a woman, and I don't want to have to be a man. There are a lot of people who feel the way I do, that what they're supposed to be is too limiting for who they really are.

How has your identification been greeted in the show-business sphere?

I just wish there was language, like when you have to fill out forms. Transgender people are invisible even though there are so many of us because there isn't a place for us to say, "This is what we are." I went to an audition and had to enter into a computer system in order to go in as male or female, so I said, "I'm not going to audition, then." We don't need special treatment—we just need to be treated as what we are, and those concerns and courtesies are important. There's a need to expand the ability to get information across to each other about who we are in an honest way so that it's healthier for everybody.

How did you get involved with developing your scent?

I developed it in New York, but it's made in France and shipped from France—it's
fancy French perfume! I started reading about the history of fragrance and found it interesting how my trans-variant ancestors perfumed themselves in order to be seductive and to go out and represent in the world. I wanted it to smell not like a citrus-y, clean, modern, sporty fragrance, but something that was heavy and rich and evoked a sensuality of the past—that was more challenging than a lot of scents that smell like a sauna or a whorehouse. It turned out exactly the way I wanted.

You've described yourself as a "world-class artist to a boutique audience." How has your audience changed?

No matter how you cut it, in the music industry I'm marginalized. I'm not saying that with any edge of bitterness whatsoever, but if I had been a normal-gendered male or a woman, I would probably have a wider audience. Because people aren't quite sure of what they're getting when they see me. My audience is progressive, smart, intelligent, adventurous. But the majority of people aren't. On one hand, it's great because I like the people in my audience and I rarely have to deal with idiots. On the other hand, I wouldn't mind idiots who pay.

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