

## CAPITAL

The complete guide to Gay Dublin

## Oi, Shaz!

Dublin singer/songwriter Shaz Oye is out, proud, and has a debut album. By Brian Finnegan

**S**ingersongwriter, Shaz Oye's (pronounced Oi-yay) voice has been described as having "all the weight of a Leonard Cohen or a Nick Cave allied to the swooping flexibility of Kate Bush," by Hot Press, and she's also been dubbed the best solo female act to come out of Ireland since Sinéad O'Connor. Lofty praise indeed for an artist who has only just released her debut album, and handy when it comes to press and promotions.

Gay men and lesbians in Ireland, however, need little in the way of promotional expletives when it comes to Oye. She is that rare thing indeed – out, proud and committed to gay rights as a natural born lesbian could be, and she's built up a fiercely loyal queer audience over her formative years of gigging across the country.

"Really, the album is the culmination of two years' work," Oye explains, "because I've been touring new material over that time to get a sense of what appeals to people. Most people who have heard me around the country have seen me sing acoustic, or with a small band, so working in the studio with a full band and new arrangements has been

interesting, and the results are really exciting. There's a whole new sound, compared with my debut EP (2003's *Child of Original Sin*). It's nearly all original material. I have one cover – a song called Prisoner from a movie in the mid-'70s – and I have put a poem called Do Not Stand on My Grave and Weep which I created music for."

Widely attributed to an American housewife called Mary Elizabeth Frye, *Do Not Stand on My Grave and Weep* is believed to have been written in 1932 as a response to the fact that Frye's Jewish friend, Margaret Schwarzkopf was unable to travel home to visit her dying mother because of the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany. More recently, it was thought to have been written by Steven Cummins, a British soldier killed on active service in Northern Ireland, who left the poem in an envelope addressed to his parents to be opened in the event of his death.

"The poem has been associated over time with bereavement and comfort, and with the effects of war on individuals, particularly in Germany and Northern Ireland. In light of the current rise of xenophobia in North America and Western Europe, I felt it was

time to breathe new life into that poem and give it back to the public. It is a reminder of what can be achieved in the spirit of generosity. A version of it can be downloaded on my website, [www.shazoye.com](http://www.shazoye.com), and there's another version of it on the album.

Born and raised in Dublin's Docklands, Oye has rooted her music in the kind of blues and jazz you'd more likely find on the streets of New Orleans, and mixed a

dram of good ole rock 'n' roll in to boot. Her ability to make an audience hush in awe is well recorded, or as one reviewer put it she can reduce "a rapt, packed audience to reverential admiring silence". Hence, a palpable air of expectation in the queer community for her album.

"I did a gig, which was organised by a gay Drogheda group called Outcomers for International Women's Day earlier this month, and I had so much support afterwards from people. Lots of gay men and women came up and told me that they really like what I'm doing, and there is always a very good gay turnout for my other gigs," she says.

"In my experience to date, being a lesbian has not had any adverse effect on my career and how I am viewed. But saying that, I am an independent artist and I am self-financed. My partner Patricia Kennedy is my manager and we control every bit of marketing ourselves, and we know the image we want to put out there. If I was with a major label I wouldn't have the autonomy to be absolutely who I am with my music."

*Truth According to Shaz Oye* is out now. Visit [www.shazoye.com](http://www.shazoye.com) for more information.