



TRUTH AND DARE

Self-releasing and promoting an album on an already crowded music market isn't for the faint-hearted, but as **Rachel Armstrong** found out, lesbian singer Shaz Oye is no pussy. And she's going to be big

Shaz Oye is on the cusp. She's just released her debut album, *Truth*, she's getting airplay on the radio and her face is plastered all over Dublin's billboards. But getting this far hasn't been easy.

"I feel like I've graduated college," she laughs over a creamy Irish coffee in Dublin's city centre. "I can't afford to be complacent, though. We may be a self-financing, back-bedroom label but the industry expects the same of us as the huge labels."

This knowledge of the music industry is something that sets Shaz apart from many of her

peers. This is no ingénue, waiting to be discovered. Along with her partner in music and life, Patricia Kennedy, she is strategically plotting her attack on the music industry one campaign at a time.

"I feel that the market in Ireland, although it's a smaller territory than in other countries, if anything it's even more competitive; Ireland is awash with talent.

"The reality of it is that most music journalists and DJs are probably getting around 50 CDs every week and that's excluding all of the major foreign stuff that comes in. They can't possibly be expected to get through all of them. So they'll get a load of CDs on their desk, which will include

someone's demo along with the latest Madonna or whatever, so it's tough. You have to be prepared to find resources and step up to the mark."

This no nonsense approach is an offshoot of Shaz's years of working in management, a career that culminated in her directorship of Dublin Aids Alliance (DAA). The years she and Patricia spent in high-pressure management positions in the past are proving invaluable.

"This is a business," she says. "There are a number of different aspects of the business. You can work developing your skills as a production assistant, you could probably earn a living as a session musician, or you might look for residency somewhere as a musician. But if you're going into the record business then that is the business of selling records. It's a commercial business and my music is a product that I want to sell. That's the reality of it."

All this talk of ways to succeed in the record business brings us on to talk of *You're A Star*. When I ask Shaz would she have done a Louise Killeen and appeared on the RTÉ pop reality TV show, she thinks for a long time.

"No, I just don't think it's me. That audience isn't my market for a start, you know? But I really admire Louise, I really, really take my hat off to her. Fair play to her for being up there and coming out on national television, it was a brave thing to do. The exposure she got was just unbelievable, I mean to be on national television is just fantastic for her career."

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Don't, for a moment, let all of this talk of product; markets and business make you think that Shaz isn't first and foremost an artist. The only thing she works at harder than selling her product is producing that product.

"I really enjoyed recording this album," she beams. "Dave McCune, who co-produces with me, sourced absolutely fantastic and really talented musicians to work on it with me. I work all the time in a vacuum, so to work in such a collaborative way was just great. It was fantastic to be able to bounce ideas off these guys and have them come up with stuff."

Shaz experienced a particularly precious moment in the recording process with pianist Gavin Murphy.

"We were working on a song called Prisoner, which is the only cover on the album and had finished it with loads of time to spare. So I said to him 'I'd just like to hear what piano parts you might come up with' for a song called Truth, which I'd played with a bit at home. Gavin started to play and I began to sing along and Dave came in and said 'Sure we'll just put that down for the hell of it'. After we did it was all kind of looked at one another and said, 'That's really good actually'. Just on the fly. It was a great moment."

The release of a debut album is a landmark in any musician's career but Shaz isn't resting on her laurels. "I look at the careers of independents like Zrazy or people like Damien Rice or Jack L, or Juliet Turner or David Gray; they were all small independents who were self-financing and have made it. They've had the hard slog, difficulty getting gigs and airplay, the whole lot. So, they've paved the way for people like me. They've made a kind of map. It's not as easy as it once was but it can be done, and hopefully I'll be able to do it."

Truth According to Shaz Oye is currently on release. Find out more at www.shazoye.com

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