

# OUT

January 12, 2015

## Cheyenne Jackson On His New Cabaret Show, Husband & Life: 'It's So Lovely'

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BY MICHAEL MUSTO



Velvet-voiced **Cheyenne Jackson** is one of those performers who have an uncanny knack for elevating moods and quickening pulses. A Broadway leading man (*Xanadu*, *Finian's Rainbow*), he's also worked in movies (*Love Is Strange*, *Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks*), and TV (*Glee*, *30-Rock*). But it's in a cabaret setting that he gets to drop the script and be himself, which is why I'm pinching myself to hear that Cheyenne is playing the **Café Carlyle in New York City from January 13-24**.

He'll do so as a newly married man, having hitched up with Slant Promotions' **Jason Landau** in September. (Jason's **Twitter tag** is, "Building brands and marketing movies and TV by day...loving my husband and daughter Billie Jean by night.") All of this good stuff merited a phone call, so I made the first move.

**Michael Musto:** Hi, Cheyenne. Will your Carlyle act consist of standards?

**Cheyenne Jackson:** There'll definitely be some standards. I feel like I want to honor that world. There'll also be some pop stuff I want to do. I'm doing a Lady Gaga song.

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**Ooh. Which one?**

I want it to be a surprise.

**“Lady is a Tramp”? I love what she’s doing with Tony Bennett.**

Me too. And I’ll do a couple of originals, too.

**This is your Carlyle debut, but you’ve done cabaret rooms before.**

I’ve done Feinstein’s, Birdland, Hotel Nikko. The last year-and-a-half I’ve toured a lot. I like the whole idea that it’s you, not playing a character. You have to generate the evening with just you up there. Not “In this show, I sang this song” and “In that show, I sang that song.” That’s really boring to me. But bring your own stories and experiences. It’s like therapy for me.

**Is your patter all pre-arranged?**

I know what I want the evening to be about and what kind of experience I want to create. But I want to allow for the spirit to move me. That’s what I learned working with Michael Feinstein. Somebody drunk heckled him once and he handled it delicately and moved on. So you have to allow for the excitement of live performance.

**At those prices, you’d think people would stay silent.**

Well, sometimes it’s the alcohol talking.

**You’ve worked with Australian singer/songwriter Sia. You were really on to her before the masses got wise.**

We wrote maybe six songs together. I think I am doing one of those songs in the act. She’s nominated for four Grammys. And I’m nominated for Best Musical Theater Album for *West Side Story*.

**Terrific. What’s more, you were recently in *Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks*, based on the 2003 Broadway play. You played a dance instructor giving retired lady Gena Rowlands private lessons, leading to all kinds of banter and revelations. You stepped in after Sean Hayes dropped out?**

His TV show got picked up and they needed a replacement quick, and they went to me. We shot the exteriors in Florida and the interiors in Budapest. When I think of a place doubling for Florida, I think Hungary. [laughs] The producers were Hungarian. It’s a very sweet movie and Gena Rowlands is amazing. She can’t give a false note. It’s invaluable to be able to spend time with an artist like that. And she’s hysterically funny. She’ll tell

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all the stories about her old costars.

**I pray she writes a memoir someday. You also had a key role in *Love is Strange*, playing a gay cop who an older gay man [Alfred Molina] moves in with when he's fired.**

What's so beautiful is it's so small and you only have three weeks to create this, but John Lithgow and Alfred Molina were so delicious and generous. They had never worked together before, and they had to create a 40-year relationship in days. It was fantastic. We felt very close, the three of us.

**You seem to be offered more varied roles these days than before.**

It's great that that's happening—I think it's come with age and experience.

**You're not just being treated as eye candy.**

That's definitely true. It was refreshingly different for me to be cast as a rapist opposite Patricia Arquette on *CSI*. Though I was talking to my mom and she said, "I like when you play nice guys." [laughs]

**Well, you *are* a nice guy, but in 2013, chatters on the gay gossip boards were going mad insisting you were having an early midlife crisis. You were divorcing your husband Monte Lapka, you shaved your head, and you were sporting tattoos. Was it just an evolution?**

I got a divorce, and I got sober. I had a short haircut and there was like one picture where I had a mustache. That was coupled with the fact that I was in the middle of a divorce and I was getting sober—and it was too much for people's heads. The last three years have been amazing. It was the next step in my life.

**No regrets?**

No, I have none.

**The end of a long-term relationship has to take a toll on those involved. How did you get through it? With the help of friends?**

Absolutely. Friends and family. You just do. It just happens, and you just get through.

**Reading all that speculative chatter, you must have at least felt, "Well, I'm definitely a celebrity."**

I didn't read all that when it was happening. I had friends who'd give me the gist. I got

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out of the habit of reading about myself several years ago, when I was in a Broadway show. I realized, “This is not doing any good.” It was a good habit to not read all the comments—and then everyone’s head exploded because I had a mustache!

**Congrats on your marriage to Jason, by the way.**

Thanks. Married life is just so lovely.

**What does he bring into your life?**

Jason is so authentically himself in every situation in life. He challenges me to embrace the things in myself that I used to be self-conscious about and to celebrate them.

**One more thing: You were fun as the spurned lover in the HBO movie about Liberace, *Behind the Candelabra*. But there were rumors that you had more to do in the original cut, which was supposedly more explicit.**

No, originally I actually had fewer scenes, but Steven Soderbergh kept adding more stuff. Like that cheating scene. He said, “I’m gonna put the camera on you and whatever you’re hearing, just react to it.”

**You’re the only one on earth who was in *Behind The Candelabra* and the last episode of *Smash* on the same night.**