

David Bowie was not God, although for kids like me in the early 1970s he was the closest we ever came to believing in one.

Neither was he perfect. For a long time there, back in the 1980s, just about everything he did was, frankly, shit. Tin Machine (I and II), Never Let Me Down, Tonight – mistakes? He made a few.

But who doesn't. Even God fucks up sometimes. When he was good, though, Bowie changed the world. And he was really good for at least a decade, commencing with *The Man Who Sold The World* (1970) and ending with *Scary Monsters* (1980).

That run of albums – 11 in all – not counting the very listenable tribute to his own musical roots, *Pin-Ups*, was topped and tailed by *Space Oddity* in 1969 and *Let's Dance* in 1983. Both of those records were better than most popular musicians could manage in a lifetime of trying, but for Bowie they were just OK.

In between, every year through the 1970s, he delivered a succession of albums which to this day sound fresh and relevant, their quality as works of musical art matched only by their cumulative impact as a statement of one man's genre and era-defining genius.

I was 12 when I first heard *Hang On To Yourself* on the radio. It seemed to me then to be a bit T-Rexy, and being a prog-rocking Genesis fan at the time it didn't mean that much to me. It was enough to get me listening to Ziggy Stardust, though.

Then, like millions of other British kids, I saw him play *Starman* on *Top Of The Pops*, and the world changed. I went to see the *Aladdin Sane* tour in Glasgow in July 1973 – 70 new pence for a seat in the upper balcony of the Green's Playhouse – and the world changed a little bit more.

Reflecting on it since the announcement of his death, and with the benefit of 40 years of hindsight, I think these are the reasons why.

Space Cadet to Major Tom

Written by The Conversation USA

David Bowie didn't invent homosexuality, or bisexuality, but he brought what we today call "queer culture" into the pop culture mainstream. He made it OK to be a sexual "deviant" from the heteronormative. Bowie was not "gay", if we take the evidence of two wives and two kids as indicative, but he was up for new experiences, in the bedroom and out, and he was not afraid to declare that interest in his interviews and in his songs.

He gave us – me, to be specific – a variant on masculinity that was very different from anything that had gone before, at least in popular culture. His 1978 song Boys Keep Swinging sums up the joy of being young and male, but at the same time is tinged with irony and ambivalence. In [the video](#)

he cross-dresses like nobody's business, and nearly forty years later the performance is a master class in how to make polymorphous perversity mainstream (in a good way).

In an era where the musical choices facing a pre-teen boy were either the triple album self-indulgence of ELP and Yes, or the macho, hairy, Hell's Angel eulogising, hotel room-trashing rock 'n' roll of the Stones and their many imitators, Bowie made rock music into art of a very British kind.

He made pop music – always the poor relation of the UK music industry – respectable. He was a pop star, even as he deconstructed the concept of stardom in his work. He was the first postmodern pop star, perhaps.

Bowie made his big break through on the BBC with his TOTP performance of Starman, and his career is studded with hugely popular songs that no sane person could fail to appreciate. For all that he pushed the boundaries of taste and culture, he was a uniquely accessible artist, while holding just enough back to always keep us wanting more.

He was the Commander. We're just the space cadets.

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