

UPPER INTERMEDIATE UNIT 10

1 Work in pairs and discuss.

- 1 Look at the photo. Do you know the singer?
- 2 What, if anything, do you know about him?
- 3 Do you have a favourite singer or group? What is it that you like about them?

2 Read a fan's tribute blog post about David Bowie. Which sentence best summarises the blog?

- 1 Bowie inspired the writer to dream and become the person he wanted to be.
- 2 Bowie transformed himself in a number of surprising and hugely influential ways.
- 3 Bowie was both a celebrated singer and film star who inspired many other artists.

3 Read the blog post again. Underline the correct alternative.

- 1 The author *was/wasn't* a big David Bowie fan when he won the competition.
- 2 His first impression of Bowie was how *varied his music was/much he identified with him*.
- 3 Bowie became a big star after *Space Oddity/Ziggy Stardust*.
- 4 His song *Changes* is symbolic because it says so much about his ever-changing *career/reputation*.
- 5 His collaborations reveal how *unpredictable/ambiguous* David Bowie was.
- 6 He was first and foremost a *singer/an actor*.
- 7 His final album was generally *liked/disliked* by critics.

A Tribute to

BOWIE



When I was fourteen years old, I won all of David Bowie's albums in a competition. I didn't know much about his music then but I spent the next months listening to one album after another. I got obsessed by Bowie, I even dreamt of becoming like him.

That was 1980, and Bowie was halfway through his career. I won twelve albums and he made another twelve before his death in January 2016. During that time I never lost my interest in the man and his music. What was it that so fascinated me about him?

First of all, I couldn't believe it was the same singer, the albums all sounded so different. He constantly reinvented himself - both his persona and his sound. His characters included the 1960s hippy astronaut Major Tom, who appeared on *Space Oddity*, one of his most famous songs. He then became the sci-fi persona Ziggy Stardust, a true rock star from outer space, which ironically turned out to be his breakthrough. From then onwards, Bowie was among the biggest names in rock music.

In the 1970s, he was a romantic hero as the Thin White Duke, a soulful jazz artist on the album *Young Americans* and then, to the shock of his fans, he became a disco diva on the dance hit *Let's Dance*. This was the most ground-breaking thing about Bowie - he never stayed in one place for long. This is poignantly expressed on one of my favourite of all his songs, *Changes*.

Always unpredictable, he collaborated with a number of other artists both mainstream and alternative, most famously with Queen on the song *Under Pressure*. But other partnerships included John Lennon, who co-wrote the smash hit *Fame*; and the producer Brian Eno, who worked with him on his Berlin trilogy of albums - *Low*, *Heroes* and *Lodger* - his most experimental period.

Seen as hugely influential to a string of other groups and singers from Nirvana to Madonna, Bowie was a true musical legend. But he didn't just make music - he also had a short-lived film career. One of his most interesting but little-known performances is his portrayal of Andy Warhol in the biopic *Basquiat*, about a New York artist. For me, his theatrical and androgynous personality became all the more apparent on the silver screen.

Until the end, the man delighted in surprising us. His final album, *Blackstar*, which received rave reviews, was released just days before his death. He clearly wanted to give one last parting gift to his fans. For the boy who had won all his albums all those years ago as an adolescent, it was nice to get one last present from the man.

4 Complete the sentences with the correct form of the words in the box.

reinvent oneself breakthrough influential
smash hit biopic parting gift legend
theatrical

- 1 Bowie was an original and highly _____ performer, so many other artists followed in his footsteps.
- 2 A _____ is a film that dramatises the life of a real person.
- 3 If you're dramatic and like to attract attention, you could be considered _____.
- 4 A _____ comes when you suddenly become successful at something.
- 5 You are a _____ if you're very well known and admired.
- 6 Bowie's _____ to his fans was the release of his final album.
- 7 He had a _____ with the song *Heroes*.
- 8 He decided to _____ so many times, he never wanted to be the same.

5 Work in pairs or small groups and discuss.

- 1 What surprised you about this summary of David Bowie's career?
- 2 How is this text different from a normal biographical text?
- 3 What makes the tribute blog personal?

6  **10.1** Listen to a conversation between Patrick and Martha about the groups or musicians who were influenced by David Bowie and answer the questions.

- 1 Why did Bowie influence so many other artists?
- 2 Which different types of music are mentioned in the dialogue?
- 3 Which of these types of music did Bowie help invent?
- 4 Which music inspired him on one of his albums?

7 Listen again. Match the artists and groups 1–6 with what is said about them a)–f).

- 1 Depeche Mode
- 2 Lady Gaga
- 3 Madonna
- 4 Nirvana
- 5 Arcade Fire
- 6 Lou Reed

- a) This person/group was good friends with Bowie and made music at the same time as him.
- b) This person/group recorded a very famous version of a Bowie song.
- c) This person/group allowed Bowie to sing one of their songs live.
- d) This person/group was inspired by his style and lyrics.
- e) This person/group copied his exaggerated costumes and image.
- f) This person/group made a public statement about Bowie's great influence.

8A The words in the box are from the recording. Match the words in the box with their meanings 1–8.

audition span outrageous echo
cover versions grunge indie overlap

- 1 type of rock music from the late 80s, influenced by punk
- 2 happen at the same time
- 3 when you act, sing or dance to get a part in a performance or as a member of a group
- 4 shocking and unusual
- 5 produced by small independent companies
- 6 last for a particular period of time
- 7 songs recorded by someone who is not the original performer
- 8 repeat a quality or a feeling

B Which of these words are colloquial?

9 Work in pairs or small groups and discuss.

- 1 Think of your favourite music groups or artists. Who would you say influenced their music? Who have they influenced?
- 2 Consider other media. Can you think of films, books or artworks which are very similar or overlap in any way?
- 3 Are there any true artists left or is everything derivative these days?