



Wardrobe

Kent & Curwen and Joyce

Art Direction

Kenneth Chan

Stylist

Kawai Wong

Hair

Ivan Lee @ Headquarters

Make up

Cathy Lau @ Colour Corner

Cover Look:

Red suit

Lanvin -Joyce

Purple shirt

Kent & Curwen

Blue pocket square

Kent & Curwen

Shoes

Prada

Chequered Look:

Chequered suit

Comme des Garçons-Joyce

Black sleeveless shirt

Raf Simons-Joyce

Shoes

Dries Van Noten-Joyce

'I'm a homosexual. I'm a faggot'

Anthony Wong explains why he came out of the closet in such a sensational fashion – and why Hong Kong is still behind when it comes to matters of sexuality

Words **ARTHUR TAM** Photography **CALVIN SIT**



It's got to take a fair amount of balls to stand on a Hong Kong stage in the middle of a packed gig and tell all your fans: 'I'm a faggot'. They've come for your music and your stage antics. They're not expecting such a blunt outburst about your sexual orientation. But that's what they get when they're Anthony Wong's fans. And the key words here are not 'stage' or 'fans' – they are 'Hong' and 'Kong'. Homosexuality is still – like it or not – a taboo and to announce that you're gay in such an audacious way sends shockwaves through the SAR. Like it did on April 23.

Wong's instantly-famous outburst rang out during the final night of a four-concert series at the Hong Kong Coliseum which celebrated the 25th anniversary of Tat Ming, the Cantopop duo formed by Wong and guitarist/composer Tats Lau which was big in the 80s, split in 1990 and has periodically reformed ever since. On the opening night there was reportedly a video shown of Wong kissing a man accompanied by the question 'is Anthony Wong a tongzhi?' (which means 'comrade' in Chinese – but is also slang for being gay). This is already as subtle as a chainsaw between the legs, but there was no question mark required come the final performance. Rumours have abounded about Wong's sexuality for more than 20 years,

but he's never kissed and told – until now.

The blatant, in your-face manner of his revelation will be seen as a landmark moment for homosexuality in the SAR. The 49-year-old told his fans, in Cantonese: "I am not tongzhi. I'm a homosexual. I'm a faggot," before adding: "I'm sorry, members of the media. For the next 20 years, I'll keep singing songs – but you don't need to ask me this question any longer."

His fans cheered and the media buzzed.

And they're still buzzing. That's because Wong's announcement calls into question the entire issue of homosexuality in oh-so-conservative Hong Kong. Like it or not, it's still a taboo here. Singers, film heroes and even politicians have 'come out' on an almost regular basis in the West – but Wong, who created the singer-songwriter platform of People Mountain People Sea, is actually only the second HK music star in history to sensationally leave the closet, following Leslie Cheung (who tragically committed suicide, aged 46, in 2003, after suffering from depression). Wong has paved the way for new debate on how the fragrant harbour is still stuck in the past when it comes to gay issues. All he had to do was announce his sexuality on stage (albeit while wearing a crown made out of dildos) and a serious conversation was sparked.

It's worth remembering that it wasn't until 1991 that the criminal laws regarding homosexuality, which had been imposed under British colonial rule, were abolished in Hong Kong. But the taboo has remained. Many still think that being gay is 'wrong'. Indeed, the

Wong's world

1985

After brief stints at TVB and on Commercial Radio, Wong responds to an advertisement put out by Lau Yi Tatin a magazine and forms the duo Tat Ming Pair. The duo is well received, often writing songs with edgy topics, including sexual orientation.

gulf between attitudes here and those in the West were highlighted in timely fashion just two weeks after Wong's announcement, when US President Barack Obama announced his endorsement of gay marriage on the other side of the world. Hong Kong society is still conservative when it comes to sexuality. And that includes the entertainment industry. Whatever it might say.

So, as Anthony Yiu-ming Wong – often referred to as Ming-gor – steps out, in steps *Time Out*. We speak to him fresh off his revelatory concert series, when he's ready to talk candidly about his homosexuality, the media fire which surrounds him and the attitudes of the music industry – and society in



CHET LAM

OPENLY GAY
INDIE CANTOPOP
SINGER-SONGWRITER

What was your reaction to Anthony Wong coming out?

Finally! Just why now? Maybe Anthony was trying to make an example out of 'voicing out' as a Hong Kong citizen regarding the threat to freedom of speech in the future. I have been admiring his work over the years. That's most important. It's time to focus again on the things Anthony has been doing for the Hong Kong music industry.

What do you think society's reaction to gay celebrities is in Hong Kong?

People don't really care as long as you do your job right.

How do you think the perceptions of gay Hong Kong celebrities have changed

over the years in our society?

It's still a taboo. Local media still try to scandalise a lot of stories but the general public's perception has shifted from fear to curiosity – then to thinking about gays as 'hip' and 'fun'. I think we have the American pop culture to thank.

Personally, do you think your sexuality has affected people's perceptions of you?

I haven't got to where I am now because of who I am but what I do. I think it's the honesty which people appreciate. All these years, people have been asking me to endorse different socially-related charity organisations and events non-stop, so in my case I would say people don't really care.

general – in his homeland, Hong Kong. But we have to wait, because he's fashionably late.

Soon enough he strolls in, casually dressed, with a backpack slung across his shoulder, pristine hair and makeup at the ready, with his manager and makeup assistant by his side. It's clear he's a man who's aware of his own style and it shows as he carefully inspects his wardrobe choices for our photoshoot. He checks himself out in a mirror, notices a slight imperfection, plucks a few nasal hairs and smiles before being shot in various poses for *Time Out*. Poised, lean and tall, Wong moves with the elegance of a man more befitting of the romantic era. And, when he's ready to get up close and personal, we know it. He's a man with a message – and that message is clear: he's here and he's queer. But he's also charming, intimate and willing to tell the truth. The whole truth...

Wong's world

1990

Tat Ming splits up due to musical differences. The two reunite in 1996, 2004 and this year respectively for a series of concerts.

1991

Wong embarks on his solo career, starting off with his debut, *Hope Faith Love*. He begins to grow a Bowie-inspired flair, carrying on the electro-synth sound and lyrical complexity of Tat Ming.

Describe that moment. The moment you told the world you're 'a faggot'.

I think the four-night concert was about Hong Kong-ness. And part of Hong Kong-ness is about being very liberated – but now I think we're losing that feeling of liberation. So, during the final night, I felt that I had to liberate myself as well as get that message across that Hong Kong is a free and liberated city. I just thought... I have to tell people who I really am.

Did you consult your family or boyfriend before you came out?

No. I didn't tell anyone besides my manager. I am a free person. I said it because I wanted to. But, of course, in retrospect, I think I should have talked to my partner and my other partner – I mean my work partner, Tat. I should have told him because I think, in a way, my coming out might have hijacked the show, which was about Hong Kong and not about me coming out. So I really do have to apologise to them. I think some people in the media got the message across – they really think the show had a lot to offer.

Did you take a lot of time preparing what you wanted to say?

No. I mean, I never hid it, but I never said it publicly. I just decided two hours before the show. I spoke with my manager about talking about my identity as a gay man up [on stage] and he said: "Yeah, why not." It was after the two songs that Tat Ming did about sexual identity and suppressed love that I thought it was very appropriate – especially for the final night.

I know you say you didn't really prepare – but what about the

video with you and the male model? (Wong released a behind-the-scenes video where he and a male model were caressing each other. This video played every night during Tat Ming's concert).

I think when we did the video, I didn't plan to come out publicly. We just thought it would be a nice, fun thing to do – to do a video like that as a backdrop for a song. But then, one thing just led to another. Actually some people didn't get the pun. You know in Chinese when you say tongzhi, it's about comrades in a political party. In the concert we played on the word tongzhi, which also means gay man. So we kept asking if Leung Chun-ying, or if this guy or that guy is tongzhi, so it has a double meaning. Do they belong to a political party or a certain group of people in society? We were talking about identity and if we are being truthful about ourselves – so I thought I might as well admit it myself.

What about the dildo crown?

I didn't know about the crown until the minute I went on stage.



TATS LAU

THE OTHER HALF OF TAT MING PAIR

Anthony said he wanted to apologise to you for hijacking the show with his 'coming out'. Do you think he did?

There is no need to apologise. Though the show was about Tat Ming, we both had the freedom to express our individuality during the show. I'm happy that my bandmate did what he did and I fully support him.

And what do you think about that dildo hat he wore?

It was a creative piece that I think made sense for the context of the show...

What do you admire about Anthony the most?

Definitely his work ethic and determination. He is committed to what he does.



‘We need more in terms of the development of gay culture – Hong Kong is behind’

It wasn't your concept?

No, no, it was the designer's concept. We give each other a lot of freedom. I didn't know about it until the first night. He asked if I could wear it and I said: "Yeah, why not?" So he kind of challenged me, so I said okay. Like I said, one thing leads to another. So we had the two songs about sexuality, then we made the video, then the costume designer made a hat like that. It was very logical for me to talk about. In a way you're asking for it. So I might as well just say it.

So, do you feel free now? Like a burden has been lifted?

Kind of. But it never really burdened me. In my private life everyone knows I'm gay. I never hid it from my family or friends. Even the press knew that I'm gay. We just never really talked about it. One thing that kept me from coming out publicly was... I didn't want to be pigeonholed. Because after you come out now... everything you talk and sing about is about being gay. But that's not what my music is about. But what I feared is that people would define me by my sexuality and not my music.

But I always told myself that I would come out publicly when I felt that society was too suppressed or when I felt the gays of the city weren't treated fairly. So I think it's time for the gay community to ask for the rights that they deserve – like marriage or the social benefits they should have.

Are you ready to become a spokesperson for gay rights?

I'm not partnering with any groups or any activism yet.

But there will be an expectation now...

No, no, no. I think I am my own spokesperson. But when I agree with the advocacy of the group I think I will join. I'm not a member of any of the activist groups.

But if someone asked you to join a gay march like Pride Parade, would you?

I think I have to see

Wong's world

1996-7

He has hits with singles like *Blow Up* and *Forbidden Fruit*, *Once a Day* and receives many awards and nominations – the first of many over the years. He's released 17 albums to date.

who the organisers are and see if we can see eye to eye. I can't just say yes or no. I think we need more in terms of gay movements or the development of gay culture – Hong Kong is a bit behind. For example, Taiwan has a much more vibrant gay culture. I don't want to be an activist though; I want to be a musician first. It's always music first – everything else is secondary.

It's worth noting here that Wong did decide to speak and perform at IDAHOT (the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia), just a day after this interview, despite his answers to the contrary. He performed two songs: *Suppressed Love* and *Full*



Day of Light, and shared his own homophobic experiences from when he was just starting Tat Ming: "I heard a mother telling her child 'oh, it's that faggot singer'. I thought that even if the mother was ignorant, she should not be teaching her children such hate speech. For me, I don't care because I've learned the kung fu to resist it, but for many others that is not the case, which is why I am here today," he told the IDAHOT crowds. Okay, back to the interview...

Are gay rights important to you? Gay marriage, in fact?

Yes, yes. Even though I'm not planning on getting married, I want to fight for people who want to do that. Everyone deserves equal rights.

Speaking of equal rights and democracy, what do you think about going to the Mainland and developing your career there?

I try not to think about it too much. I try not to censor my own work. If I went to work in the Mainland and they said you can't do this, you can't do that, then I'll try to deal with it then. But I don't want to censor it myself.

So you want to do it your way?

But of course they have different rules and regulations. I'll try to do what I do in Hong Kong in a legal way. But if they said no, I'll try to make do.

Do you think the entertainment industry is behind in accepting homosexuality? Does it have a certain type of homophobia?

No, I don't think so... I mean there are a lot of gays in the entertainment industry, but it's a bit like a 'don't ask don't tell policy' (chuckles).

Wong's world

1999

With other local artists, Wong creates the label People Mountain People Sea, noted for remaining relatively independent and artist-orientated. PMPs produces successful, high profile commercial artists such as Nicholas Tse, Faye Wong and Leslie Cheung. The label also begins to explore alternative and indie groups including at17 and, later, Pixeltoy.

'I think it's time for the gay community to ask for the rights they deserve'

People know that you are – but that shouldn't matter. It should be about the music.

Why is it then that it's such a struggle for artists to come out?

Perhaps it's the same reason why I chose not to come out publicly. It's about not wanting to be pigeonholed. And I am not the only one who's come out publicly. There's Leslie, Chet Lam, Stanley Kwan. Maybe they didn't say it at the Coliseum, though (chuckles again).

Quite right. The way you said it at the Coliseum was powerful and it didn't leave any room for misunderstanding, right?

Right, right – well I didn't want to do it with a magazine because I didn't want anyone to twist my words. So I wanted everyone to be there to hear it. All the magazines and newspapers were there so no-one could distort my words.

Why did you say it the way you did?

It's like: I am 'tongzhi' is very polite. I am gay, I am a homosexual, I am a faggot is much more direct.

Why did you use the derogatory word at the end – I am 'gei lo', meaning faggot?

Because people who obviously want to insult you use that when they want to put you down. So, I'm telling you that I am not afraid of that word. That you can't put me down. Because I call myself a queer, I call myself a faggot – I am not afraid.

Were you ever afraid that, by coming out, commercial endorsements might fall through?

Yes, but I did what was the right thing to do. I'm never a person that cares too much about commercials or endorsements. But, of course, this is my living.

If it's the right thing to do, would you encourage others to come out?

I mean it's the right thing for me – but I wouldn't encourage it.

But would you like to see more people in Hong Kong come out?

I mean, how should I put it? I would like there to be a day when I don't have to tell people who I sleep with. I don't need to ask a straight man or a straight woman who I sleep with. We shouldn't care about who we sleep with.

Are you in a committed relationship now?

Yes, I am in a relationship.

Is it serious?

It is a committed relationship, so it is serious.

In love?

Yes.

Glad to be gay Great global coming-outs



BOY GEORGE

The UK's George O'Dowd, former Culture Club frontman and androgynous 80s icon, came out to his family when he was 15 but only did so publicly in 1985 – and had to wear a bulletproof vest while on tour in the USA due to death threats.



GEORGE MICHAEL

One of the world's best-selling solo artists, and formerly a member of 80s pop group Wham!, George massively courted controversy when he was arrested for 'engaging in a lewd act' in a public toilet in Beverly Hills, California, in 1998. The world pretty much guessed he'd gone outside from there...



KD LANG

The Grammy Award-winning Canadian singer and committed Buddhist came out in a 1992 issue of LGBT magazine *The Advocate*, a move that only served to heighten her popularity and facilitate her transition from country star to pop diva on the back of her double-Platinum 1992 pop album *Ingénue*.



LESLIE CHEUNG

The legendary Gor Gor, one of Hong Kong's most dynamic stars, revealed his homosexuality by professing love to 18-year partner Tong Tong at one of his concerts – but only after Tong could afford to retire, as Leslie feared it may be bad for his banking career.



ELLEN DEGENERES

Comedian and talk show host DeGeneres, who married actress Portia de Rossi in 2008, came out on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1997 under the headline 'Yep, I'm gay'. It followed speculation that

Ellen would feature a coming-out episode, which 42 million people watched a week later. Today she is a Special Envoy for Global AIDS Awareness.



KEVIN TSAI

Frequently sporting a stuffed bird on his shoulder while co-hosting massively popular Taiwanese variety show *Here Comes Kangxi*, Tsai came out of the closet in 2002 to zero backlash. His 2011 opposition to homophobic comments made by a Chinese actress sparked widespread support in China, even from a CCTV anchor as well as his 14 million-strong following on Weibo.



GEORGE TAKEI

Takei, best known as Captain Hikaru Sulu, *Star Trek* helmsman, came out in 2005. The following year George did Equality Trek, a nationwide speaking tour about his life as a gay Japanese-American. He married his partner of more than 20 years a couple of years later.



RICKY MARTIN

The famous Spanish-Puerto Rican solo artist who has sold more than 60 million albums and released hits such as *Livin' La Vida Loca*, came out on his website as a 'fortunate homosexual man' in 2010 just before his 40th birthday. Since then his twitter following has grown more than 1,200 percent to over six million.



HONG SUK-CHUN

Korean model and actor Hong's 'yes' in response to being asked if he liked men was edited out of a TV talk show but he came out a week later, causing him to be fired by all his TV networks. Unbroken, he opened a restaurant – and in March he admitted to being in a gay relationship.



JING WONG

SINGER/SONGWRITER SIGNED TO PEOPLE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE SEA

What did you think of Anthony Wong's decision to come out?

I give him 200 percent support! Everybody should have the freedom to be who they are and speak what they think.

Do you think the fact that many people knew he was gay before his announcement took away the true media impact of coming out publicly?

I think Hong Kong is much more conservative than people are willing to admit. And the fact that many people know [that it is conservative], it's still a situation where they just bear with it.

Do you think that the music industry is conservative as well?

I think within the music industry, homosexuality is so common that it really comes naturally. People won't question it at all, just as you wouldn't ask a heterosexual guy if he likes girls. The fact that an artist declaring himself as gay can be on the front page shows that the society is conservative.

And finally, do you think our society has changed a lot in the past 10 years?

I must be blind if it has changed.



FUNG LAI-CHI

VETERAN MUSIC CRITIC

How has the perspective of homosexuality changed within the music industry?

To me, the perspective within the music industry is better now than it was 10 years ago. I think homosexuality is generally accepted by people in the music industry.

Is coming out discouraged?

I don't think coming out is generally discouraged in the industry—and I don't think it will detriment someone's career.

How do you think it will affect Anthony Wong's career?

I don't think it will have any effect.

Do you think coming out was a good decision for him?

I can't say. If someone sees one thing which is good for him coming out of it, then it's good. If someone sees one thing which is bad, however, then it's bad.

Finally, what reasons do artists choose to remain inside the closet?

I'd say there are different reasons. I don't know the main reason. I appreciate the reasons they come out and I appreciate the reasons they choose to remain in the closet. We're all hiding many things, though, aren't we?

Living together?

Haha! I don't want to talk more about it.

By coming out, then, do you feel that your personal life has been more enriched? Or have you just been hounded by the media?

For the time being, I feel some inconvenience because some paparazzi have been following me. I should apologise to my boyfriend for that, but it should be okay in the long run...

You've said that gossip kills. Are you able to elaborate?

No. Well... I mean, I know people like to buy gossip magazines, but I think there should be a limit with what you are curious about. We should draw a line between harmless gossip and privacy. We are entertainers – but we don't need to entertain your curiosity about our private lives.

How did you feel during those times when your sexuality was a hot topic of gossip? Were you ever angry?

It's a two-way thing. I never really give the media what they want. They want to know about it but I keep that part of my life really private. So they just have to get used to it. They have to deal with it. I think some of my peers in the business like to talk about their private

Wong's world

2008

Wong releases *King of the Road*, an album with a significantly different sound to his previous works. Removed from his more electronic roots, he segues into more of a folk/ballad sound, influenced by the death of his mother.



2010

He receives the 'Award for a Decade of Excellency in Cantonese Music' from the Chinese Media, for *My 21st Century*.



Fabulously over the top! Anthony Wong in a variety of outfits (plus a dildo hat – pixalated so as not to offend)

2012

He performs in a reunion set of concerts as *Tat Ming Pair*—and publically announces his homosexuality. In sensational fashion.

lives in order to get more coverage. But that's not what I want.

At this stage of the interview, we get the sense that Wong is a man that knows how to keep his life private. He starts to pause more and takes much more time to answer our questions...

Will the message of homosexuality be carried out more in your music from now on? Or can people expect to hear a marked difference in your lyrics?

No, I don't think so. I mean, I talk about those things in my old songs. In the 80s I already started writing music about it and, throughout my career, I talk about gender issues. I don't think I will particularly need to write more songs about it.

Moving on, do you have big plan now to develop *People Mountain People Sea*? Who are you going to push?

I'm going to try to bring the tour to different parts of China. For PMPS we are going to try to put our focus on Ellen Loo and Jing Wong – the two singer-songwriters. We're not going to sign new people because we're quite a small company.

A small company with a big impact?

Yes, yes (*chuckles*).

What do you think about the gay scene in Hong Kong? Did you ever go out to the bars and clubs?

I mean, I always have. I never stopped myself. I went to bars. I went to clubs. I wasn't afraid of being photographed. But I guess people are shocked because I came out on the centre-stage of the Coliseum.

Do you think the gay scene should improve in Hong Kong?

I myself have never been a big fan of 'gay' (uses "finger quotes") culture. I think, ugh... sometimes it's quite boring. It's quite stereotypical – but we should still give everyone the liberty to do what they want. The gay scene in Hong Kong is just about consumerism and fashion. There is nothing more than that – it's quite narrow. In an idealistic world you don't particularly need gay culture. We are just human beings like everyone else.

You're not afraid – but there are many people that still are. What advice can you give someone who's coming out?

You don't have to follow the societal ideas about how to love someone. Just follow your whole heart. On the other hand, adults should just leave kids alone. I think the adults should just try and make a safe environment [for kids] to grow up in. Don't let them grow up in fear. Don't let them live in suppression.

How did you come out to your parents?

I came out to my parents 20 years ago. There were some hard times but I fought for myself, so they had to accept it.

If your parents were still here, would you come out publicly?

Yes, I mean, I'm not a young kid any more, so I should do what I please.

Do you see yourself as a pioneer?

I don't want to see that. I just do what I have to do. When you see yourself as a pioneer or a leader you put too much pressure on yourself. I'm a musician first, so I want to do my job as a musician. I want to do it well and make inspirational music.

‘We are entertainers – but we don't need to entertain your curiosity about our private lives’