



Gold, Ari (b. 1977)

by Victoria Shannon

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Ari Gold in 2007.
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"I'm having a blast being a full time *Homofessional Gaylebrity*," Ari Gold wrote in *The Advocate* in 2006. Indeed, the award-winning, openly gay, independent recording artist has fashioned a high-octane career that shows no signs of slowing down.

An Orthodox Jew who was a successful child vocalist, Gold has struggled with his gay identity both within the Jewish community and in the music industry.

Unusual for his openness in a business hat has not exactly welcomed openly gay performers, Gold has declared, "Labels don't have to define us. They simply describe us--they shouldn't confine us. I for one am proud to be known as a gay artist I am done with hiding and done with shame in any form."

Born and raised in the Bronx in New York City, Gold's parents both taught in New York City public schools, and both loved show business. Gold calls his parents "show Jews." When Gold was born on February 11, 1977, his birth announcement read like a show bill:

METRO **GOLD** WINNING PRODUCTIONS

Proudly Present

"Another Smash Hit"

OUR THREE SONS

With the brilliant new star

ARI GOLD

Gold's singing ability was discovered at the age of five when he performed at his brother's bar-mitzvah. In 1983, Gold and his two brothers won first prize in the First Annual Jewish Children's Song Festival, described by Gold as "sort of an 'American Idol' for Orthodox Jews."

At age six, Gold's first job was playing the lead role in a CBS children's record called "Pot Belly Bear," which eventually went platinum. When the record was released, a red-headed boy with freckles smiled on the cover. Gold's agents told him he was "too ethnic" to be on camera. The only on-camera commercial he was cast in came about when an advertising agency wanted an "old world" type for Muller's Egg Noodles.

In 1984, Gold sang back-up for Diana Ross when she needed a children's choir for her *Swept Away* album. The same year he sang in the "My Buddy" jingle for Jell-O Pudding Pops with Bill Cosby. As a child, he sang over 400 jingles.

When he was eight, Gold did girls' voices for the syndicated cartoon series *Jem and the Holograms*, which ran from 1985 to 1988. He also recorded a girl's voice for the talking Cabbage Patch Kids dolls. You could dial the Cabbage Patch Kids talking telephone and hear Gold say, "Hi, I'm Sybil Sadie. Want to come play with me?"

Gold attended Yeshiva High School in Manhattan where he tried to downplay his music career. While he knew that girls might think his career interesting, he was afraid that boys might make fun of him, especially for voicing girls.

He tried not to talk about his work at school, and when he went to work he hid his yarmulke. It seemed ironic to Gold even then that he was hiding two essential aspects of his identity in an effort to be as "all-American" as he could at work and in school.

Perhaps presaging his desire to have a career as a solo singer, Gold recorded his first demo at age 12. By age 14, he was writing his own songs. One of the first songs he wrote is called "Experienced Girl," about an ex-girlfriend, who recently asked Gold to sing another of his songs, "Bashert (Meant to Be)," from his 2004 album, *Space Under Sun*, at her traditional Jewish wedding to another woman. "That's right," Gold says. "My first girlfriend turned out to be a lesbian."

In high school, Gold had two girlfriends, which he thought kept him safe from being outed as a "homo." He had a lot to deal with for a teenager: his status as a minor celebrity, the complexities of Orthodox Judaism, and his closeted sexuality. Gold says, "I can joke about it now, but at the time I felt quite tortured and felt that if anyone found out my secret of being gay I would be ex-communicated from my friends, my school, my community, and my family."

Gold came out to his best friend at Yeshiva High School when he was sixteen. Two years later, he came out to his family in an 18-page letter. Gold says his family's reaction was "fairly accepting," but along with coming out he stopped being observant. "My Mom was proud of me because she thought it wasn't healthy to keep a secret like that," Gold says, "but when I stopped being religious, that was a lot more difficult for them."

After graduating from Yeshiva High School, Gold studied music and cultural studies at Yale University, then transferred to New York University where he earned his B.A.

While in college Gold decided that if he was going to continue to write and sing, he wanted to be the kind of artist he never saw growing up: "not just out and proud from the beginning of my career but also singing about life as a gay man."

Influenced by such artists as Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Al Green, and Whitney Houston, as well as the club music of the 1970s and 1980s, Gold developed his style by infusing Rhythm and Blues with a fresh, specifically gay sensibility. Inasmuch as R&B and Hip-Hop music scenes are sometimes considered homophobic, Gold's audacity in queering this musical genre is especially impressive.

He began performing his original music at New York City hotspots like Joe's Pub, Fez, China Club, Barracuda, Metronome, Avalon, Pyramid, Splash, Bar d'O, Starlight, and CBGB's, all the while working on his self-titled debut album, which he released in 2000.

To launch and promote his CD, Gold took advantage of marketing and distribution outlets made possible by the Internet and also created his own web site. Good reviews also helped the album find an audience. For example, *Billboard Magazine* described the CD as "steeped in sticky pop melodies, sing-along hooks, and butt-shakin' funk rhythms . . . solid radio-ready material."

Ari Gold included explicit gay love songs, such as "Write Me a Love Song" and "Home." In the former, Gold sings openly about his lover asking him to write him a song about love between men.

The album won the 2002 Outmusic Award for Outstanding Debut Recording. Later that year, Gold was

named one of *Genre Magazine's* "Men We Love."

The debut album caught the attention of Desmond Child who had worked with stars like Ricky Martin, Cher, Kelly Clarkson, and Aerosmith. Child and Gold collaborated on the single, "I'm All About You," which debuted on the top 20 U.K. charts and became a top 10 dance hit. The video was heavily played on MTV in the U.S. and The Box in the U.K. The single was co-written with garage stars DJ Luck and MC Neat; Gold performed with them on almost every major TV and radio show in the U.K. to support the single.

In 2004, Gold released his sophomore album *Space Under Sun* on his own label, Gold18 Records. It debuted as #1 on the Outvoice Charts, and Gold was featured on the covers of many gay magazines. The album solidified Gold as an emerging gay musical star. *Metro Source Magazine* named Gold one of the "25 People That Make Us Proud."

The album includes songs about such subjects as a man and woman fighting over the same man ("He's on My Team") and the trauma of getting caught by the cops having sex in public ("Caught"). It also includes the tender ballad "Bashert (Meant to Be)," which reflects Gold's Jewish identity.

Two music videos based on songs in *Space Under Sun* achieved independent success. "Wave of You" is still played on Rock America and For Promo Only. It is also featured as a DVD extra on "Boys Life 4: Fourplay," a series of gay-themed Indie shorts from Strand Releasing. The video also became a mainstay on the newly launched LOGO television network and went on to make the list of LOGO's best videos of 2005.

Gold's second video from *Space Under Sun*, "Love Will Take Over," bumped Madonna out of the #1 spot on LOGO's list. The video has been played on HBO Zone, Rock America, and For Promo Only.

On the tour for *Space Under Sun*, Gold opened for RuPaul and Chaka Khan and headlined clubs and festivals in France, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, the Czech Republic, and Canada. He also toured 25 cities across the United States.

Space Under Sun won the 2005 Outmusic Award for Outstanding New CD. The song "Bashert (Meant to Be)" was included on the ACLU's fund-raising CD *Marry Me*, released in 2004 to benefit the effort to secure the rights of same-sex couples.

Riding the success of his first two albums and related videos, Gold emerged as a refreshingly open public personality. He appeared in fashion magazines like *W* and *VIBE*, for which he was photographed by Walter Chin and chosen as one of "The Stylistics" in the January 2002 issue. He was named one of the "9 Hottest Men in NYC" by *H/X* magazine, and one of the hottest men in the world by *DNA* magazine.

After interviewing and photographing Gold for *AXM Magazine*, Boy George chose Gold as the spokesmodel for George's clothing line RUDE.

Gold's 12-month *Calendar* features photos of him by famous photographers and a cover designed by illustrator Joe Phillips. The *Calendar* is a best-selling item at Gold's online fan store at www.arigold.com, and it has been featured in *Heeb Magazine's* Jewgayica.

In 2005, Gold released *Ari Gold: The Photobook*, a 96-page, hardcover, coffee-table book available in 25 countries. It comes with a limited edition Remix CD called *The Remixes*, Gold's first full-length remix album.

The album was named the #2 Best Independent Release of 2005. The CD includes new dance mixes of the club and video hit "Wave of You," "He's on My Team," "Funk That Ship," and "Bashert (Meant to Be)," as well

as new mixes of "Love Will Take Over."

In 2007, Gold released his third studio album *Transport Systems*. The songs on this album are about such topics as the down low, gay relationships, crystal meth addiction, gender identity, and spirituality.

The lead single, "Where the Music Takes You," became #1 on Sirius Radio, a Top 40 HOT AC hit, and a Top 40 Billboard Dance hit. The Joe Phillips video of the song was the #1 Video of the Year on LOGO.

The reviewer of the album for *People Magazine* observed that "Gold takes the listener to fresh places" ; while the reviewer for *All Music Guide* noted that "Ari Gold stands out from the pack . . . specializing in R&B electro dance sounds that are a pleasant surprise."

In 2008, Gold contributed an essay to Mitchell Gold and Mindy Drucker's book *Crisis: 40 Stories Revealing the Personal, Social, and Religious Pain and Trauma of Growing Up Gay in America*. In his essay, Gold reminisces about growing up Orthodox and gay, ruefully observing, "Once I decided I didn't want to hide anymore, and be fully who I am, I realized that isn't allowed in this religion that I loved so much."

He also discusses the frustration he has experienced in the music industry because of his sexuality. Record executives and producers, both straight and gay, told Gold an openly gay artist would never sell records. They advised him to "get established first and then come out of the closet."

Gold's interest in cinema may lead him to other directions in the years ahead. In 1997, he supervised the music and performed his song "See Through Me" in *Latin Boys Go to Hell*, a low-budget, comic drama directed by Ela Troyana. More recently, he served as music supervisor for IFC's documentary *Fabulous: The Story of Queer Cinema*, a made-for-cable documentary directed by Lesli Klainberg and Lisa Ades in 2006.

Gold contributes generously to gay causes, including Human Rights Campaign, Soulforce, Gay Men's Health Crisis, and the Bailey House, among others.

As for being a gay artist, Gold says he sees his gayness as a gift. "As long as my friends are being beaten on the street, as long as there are still kids killing themselves because of shame, and as long as we are still fighting for our basic civil and human rights, I will continue to shout from the queer roof tops. Feminism taught us that the personal is political. And in art, it is the specificity of our experiences that is universal."

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About the Author

Victoria Shannon is an adjunct faculty member at DePaul University and Columbia College Chicago. At Columbia, she develops glbtq-related courses and teaches "Gay & Lesbian Studies," a course she created several years ago.