



An Interview with :

Alex Orange Drink

Alex Orange Drink is the solo moniker for Alex Zarou Levine, lead singer and songwriter of The So So Glos. Alex is known for his "streetwise and irreverent lyrics", which have drawn comparisons from William Wordsworth to the Beastie Boys.

Tell us about your diagnosis:

How old were you when you were diagnosed with HCU?

Luckily, I was picked up at birth in 1987 through New York Newborn Screening. I was pretty sick for the first 3-4 weeks, until diagnosis was confirmed.

How did you feel about the diagnosis growing up?

As a kid, I just ignored it. That carried into my late 20s. I didn't focus much brain energy on it, but definitely had an awareness I had it, and it had extreme consequences. I felt like I had to pretend that I didn't have it - It was my thing. I would just go to parties and figure it out.

What are some of the challenges you have faced with HCU?

Just having the diagnosis of Homocystinuria definitely messed me up because of all the restrictions and constant threat, and then the feeling of being a guinea pig. There is a lot of uncertainty and isolation - it was scary. So, I tried to distract myself with art and music, specifically punk rock, rock and roll and hip hop. Whether the struggle is medical, personal, economical, you can find a haven in this type of music, which is why I gravitated towards it.

Let's talk about your music

How old were you when you first got "into music"

I was 4 years old. We didn't know how to play our instruments, but we were given a lot of freedom to make a lot of noise; that was probably very annoying. I was compulsively writing songs and recording them - there were tapes, and tapes, and tapes of them at that age. Then as we grew up, we became The So So Glos - we became a staple in the DIY Brooklyn, NY scene. We got to play a lot of shows, including Letterman and traveled for over 10 years internationally. We are still a band working on a new album.

I started this solo album about 4 years ago while the band was taking a little break after touring for the past decade. I had a major shape shift in my personal life, and the songs had a different voice, a little bit more personal, more introspective. That's where this album came from.

When did you know that this is what you wanted to do professionally? Did you ever consider anything else - any jobs prior?

While I haven't mastered music, I've mastered what I do to an extent I'm like "I got this". So, it was never a conscious decision to do this, it was just automatic. Early on I didn't do anything else, and now I feel like it's too late to do anything else. It was never a conscious decision. I've had a lot of jobs though between gigs. Construction, art handler, you name it - whatever it took to pay the bills and stay on top of things.

Who are your musical idols/inspirations? Do you believe they influenced your ability to include bits of your personal life and diagnosis into your music?

The ones who inspire me are the ones who are brave enough to be honest. Joe Strummer of the Clash has a quote "You don't have to learn the 15-minute guitar solo to get up there, you can have 4 chords and the truth." Jimmy Cliff & Notorious B.I.G. were very honest poets, who put all their strife and struggle into making a negative into a positive. Harry Belafonte and Fiona Apple are a couple others I draw from.

Diagnosis meets music:

Do you ever feel that your diagnosis was a setback for your musical career?

In terms of learning music in general, I felt dyslexic in a way. I couldn't learn conventional music. I couldn't do it by the book. I couldn't learn the notes, music theory, I'm not good at math - my brain didn't work in that way. Not sure if it's psychological or not, nature or nurture. But it caused deep insecurity from not grasping certain concepts musically and feeling like I was limited by having a disorder.



But I think I'm a stupid optimist where I think I can't do that; I can do this. Maybe I'm not supposed to be a classically trained musician, but a punk rocker and that's what I felt anyway. It was the thing that made me feel like I didn't need to bounce off the walls. I've learned to embrace my insecurities.

Letting the diagnosis inspire you:

Tell us about adopting your moniker - Alex Orange Drink
 Alex Orange Drink comes from my formula; orange drink is the slang. I always called it that because it was this disgusting orange flavor. I felt like this was taking a negative and switching it into a positive, and making it this super power,

super drink, for this unique rock star who has this power. Inspired by the hip-hop mentality, which tends to celebrate and embrace its struggle.

What influence did HCU have on your new album?

Homocystinuria part 1: 1994-1997 - is all about living with this disease, then feeling like an outsider/outcast. It is all about checkups at the hospital, taking trips, feeling different at birthday parties, and the inspirations of artists that could relate to me and helped me get through this period. Those artists made me feel safe, it was my medicine.



Regardless if you want to think about it or not, you are always reminded of this thing, your mortality, every time you sit down to eat, every time you go out, every time you are with friends. Food is a connector, but in

our case, it was a reminder of feeling like an outcast or a bit different. It's not something to glamorize, but it helped me find my voice artistically, and fit into a timeline of rock and roll.

To those who would like to use their talents to advocate and raise awareness, what advice do you have to give?

I've learned through a lot of other heroes and inspirational figures that the thing you think is holding you back, is something you should embrace and be proud of and will give you a special voice and be your savior too. There are a million ways to learn, a million ways to triumph, and a million ways to fail, and it's all fine - they don't teach you that.

How can our audience keep up with Alex Orange Drink or the So So Glos?

Alex Orange Drink:

- Instagram: @alexorangedrink
- Facebook: @alexorangedrink
- Soundcloud: alexanderorangedrink
- Spotify:
<https://open.spotify.com/artist/6MjoFNppz6Tm6qCdHrzcvx>
- Bandcamp:
<https://alexanderorangedrink.bandcamp.com/>
- Website: alexorangedrink.com

So So Glos

- Facebook: @sosoglos
- Instagram: @sosoglos
- Spotify:
<https://open.spotify.com/artist/3WrUzXz7uxtNFZuapRMhiP>