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GARY BEALS / CANADA
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“I am Canadian. Born and raised in Nova Scotia. I grew up in a small Black community. Church and community were a major part of my upbringing and both were very integral in shaping my morals and values and my view of life; it’s where my paradigm was formed. As I child, I was loved. I knew it and I felt it. From a young age, growing up in church I was taught that homosexuality was a sin. To be gay was frowned upon. The negative perceptions of gay people and the hate toward the sin was embedded in the culture so I always perceived it as being wrong.

When I became consciously aware that I was attracted to men I hide that fact about myself. Why? Because I had been conditioned to believe it was wrong. I initially didn't understand the feeling. Why would God make me gay? I had no gay role models to aspire to be like because this country boy didn't know any. I thought I didn't have anybody to talk to because I thought no one would understand, so I struggled internally. Alone. I teeter tottered between what I had been taught to what felt natural to me, always choosing the former. Being gay was something that I suppressed, it was something that I didn't discuss with others, depriving myself of myself. I was a prisoner in my own body. Afraid to expose who I really was. Scared to lose the love of my family and friends. I became numb to the fact that I was gay.

Music then became my refuge. My pain was expressed through song. It was my outlet and it also became my happy place. Music was my superhero, writing was my therapy. But even my music wasn't entirely authentic. In 2003, I became the 2nd runner up on the 1st season of Canadian Idol. I then went on to release two studio albums, I won and had been nominated for countless awards and had performed all across the country but I always felt like something was missing. My soul wasn't at peace. The expectation to perform was so high that I continued to maneuver about struggling with my sexuality internally, not wanting to disappoint the public or bring shame and guilt to my family and community, so I continued to play a role once again abandoning myself.

Fast forward to today. I smile differently. I can now say I walk unapologetically in my truth, embracing everything that I am. My gayness does not make up the totality of who I am, but I am proud to be a gay man! In March, I released my 1st single in over 10 years "Me For Me" from my soon to be released album (video also now out). The video depicts the struggles that we the LGBTQ+ community face when it comes to self-acceptance. The song itself is about being vulnerable and not being afraid to expose pieces of ourselves. It's about having open and honest conversations with those we love. "Me For Me" is about relationship and that risk vs reward questioning that we all face in the search of true love and how far we would really go for that love. The opening line of the chorus says "How could you not take me for me"? And here I am after all these years, loving the skin that I am in, I now accept "Me For Me".


Gary Beals single "**Me For Me**" can be streamed through most streaming services (<https://youtu.be/sTOoq73p2Ho> (<https://youtu.be/sTOoq73p2Ho>)) and the music video can be seen at : <https://youtu.be/sTOoq73p2Ho> (<https://youtu.be/sTOoq73p2Ho>)"

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