

# Alan Cumming Is a Fountain of Youth Unto Himself

The two-time Tony winner chats with VF about his new cabaret show about aging happily, his Club Cumming speakeasy, and what to expect from season three of *The Traitors*.



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“I am in my 60th year,” says **Alan Cumming**, drolly. “Isn’t that nuts?” While he’s technically still 59, the two-time Tony winner is just a Broadway baby at heart. Look no further than his cabaret show, *Alan Cumming Is Not Acting His Age*—a musical exploration about growing up—which has its second New York performance on Monday, March 25, at Studio 54.

“It’s about my thoughts on getting older, aging—something we’re all doing,” says Cumming. “Wondering why we have all decided that is the worst possible thing that can happen to you, when it’s inexorable.” In the cabaret show, which sees Cumming perform rousing renditions of varied numbers—from **Adele’s** “When We Were Young” to the song book of **John Kander** and Fred Ebb—Cumming rails against society’s preconceived notions about getting older. “My big message is, I don’t think we should act our age, because I think that means we’re allowing other people to dictate to us how we should experience life,” he says. “I think that’s death.”

Completing a full circle, *Alan Cumming Is Not Acting His Age* is going up at Studio 54, the same theater where he played the Emcee in *Cabaret* in 1998—for which he won his first Tony—and reprised the role in a production 16 years later. “For me to do a cabaret at the place where I spent so long doing *Cabaret*, it’s perfect,” he says.



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Studio 54 also spawned another beloved facet of Cumming’s life: Club Cumming, which began as an after-party in his dressing room during his *Cabaret* days. The revelry eventually became its own institution as an East Village bar and performance venue, but there’s a blue neon sign under the window of his dressing room that declares it “The Original Home of Club Cumming.”

“My friend Carmine sent me a picture when there was a storm last year. It said, “The Original Home of Cum,” because the lights...” he says, laughing. “I’ve heard every joke about my name, but that actually made me laugh.”

Part of what keeps Cumming young are his friends, including **Kristin Chenoweth**, **Vanessa Williams**, and **Jane Krakowski**, all of whom were in the audience of his first performance of *Alan Cumming Is Not Acting His Age* on March 11. “I joke in the show that all my peers have kind of gone by the wayside,” he says. “It may seem an extreme thing to do, but in order to have both a stream of new young friends and a venue with where to party with them, I bought my own club.” If you can believe it, owning a popular downtown speakeasy can lead to wild arrangements of starry individuals crossing paths.

“**Billie Jean King** came. I tell a story about her in the show,” he says. “She and **Emma Stone** and **Paul McCartney** all came to Club Cumming, and we sang a song. It’s like, Paul McCartney, Billie Jean King, and Emma Stone walk into a bar—hilarity ensues.”

Oscar winners, sports legends, and music superstars are not the only people Cumming hosts at his club. He recently hosted the season-two cast of *The Traitors* (streaming on Peacock). As host of the mega-popular show, Cumming is high-drama and high-camp as the master of ceremonies of a fake reality competition, playing the part so convincingly that it makes interacting with the contestants outside of the show somewhat fraught. “I went and met them for a drink, and it was so weird,” he says. “It’s the first time they had seen me as *me*, actually. It was like when you have a drink with your teacher when you leave school or something.”

Which traitor was the most intimidated by Cumming? **Dan Gheesling**. “I went up to him and went, ‘Dan, you have received the most votes and are banished from the game,’” he says, mimicking his iconic line from the series. Dan’s reaction to the bit “was like a cartoon character coming to life.” Maintaining that veneer of authority is precisely why he didn’t host the *The Traitors* reunion, letting Bravo’s **Andy Cohen** do the job instead. “I think it’s important for me to maintain a sort of distance,” says Cumming. “I’m playing this character that’s kind of a stern daddy. For me to give my opinions and talk about it in a conversational way, I don’t think it’d be right.”

The massive success of *The Traitors* wasn’t on Cumming’s bingo card, though. “It’s all such a pleasant surprise because it’s unexpected, and I actually really enjoy it,” he says. “Sometimes you have great successful things that you have an okay time doing. But the way that this has sort of captured the moment and people are so obsessed about it, I actually understand, because I am too.” In the first performance of *Alan Cumming Is Not Acting His Age*, he gave a little nod to his fabulous fashion from *The Traitors*, coming out on stage after an intermission in his iconic all-black ensemble from the funeral episode.

“I came on wearing the black cloak and veil hat,” he says. “And then I took it off and sang ‘Mein Herr.’ So there was this gigantic big cloak on the stage lying beside me like I was Liberace or **Shirley Bassey**.”

In May, Cumming returns to his native Scotland to film the third season of *The Traitors*, with a brand new cast of faithfuls and traitors that may surprise viewers. “The whole thing has snowballed, and so, I guess, has the interest of people who’d want to be on it,” he says. “I know two people, so far. But I cannot possibly say.” Staying tight-lipped about *The Traitors* hasn’t been easy for the actor. “I see people and they just go, ‘No spoilers!’ So I’m always really cautious, and I have this really good poker face,” he says. “I say, ‘Who do you think is going to be kicked off next week?’ And they say, and I just go, ‘An interesting theory.’”

Is keeping the secrets of *The Traitors* harder for Cumming than, say, playing every part in *Macbeth*, a feat he accomplished on Broadway in 2013? He responds without missing a beat. “*Macbeth* is harder.”



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