



**“TRANSPHOBIA IS  
NEVER OKAY!”**

**So says music newcomer, Kyler O’Neal as they prepare to shake up the music world. Interview by Marc Andrews.**

**DNA:** Welcome to the pop world! Where have you been all this time?

**Kyler O’Neal:** Hustling, transitioning... and more hustling! [Laughs] I’ve always been creative and musical but the minute I finished college I focused entirely on transitioning into who I am now (residentially, physically, legally, etc.). After achieving some transitional goals, I finally resurfaced and dove into the arts.

**What made you decide to follow a career in music?**

Music is in my blood. My dad’s a pianist and gospel songwriter and my mom’s a classically trained singer. Music allows me to express when I sing and escape to another realm while I listen. Per the advice of my god-brother, who also records music, I decided to give a music career a shot and release some songs.

**Have you always written and sung songs, even as a child or teen?**

I sang a lot as a child. I grew up singing in the church and sang solos. I even got to sing at a ceremony attended by Rosa Parks [icon of the civil rights movement]. While I’ve written poetry since middle school, I didn’t write my first song until after college.

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I enjoy hip-hop and rap but there are many songs where trans and queer folk are shunned in the lyrics.

**Was music a kind of therapy for you during your adolescence?**

Absolutely! A song can shift or enhance a mood, illicit joy or validate dark emotions and all of that good stuff. [Laughs] Growing up, I didn’t really fit in with my peers, nor could I relate much to the characters on TV or in movie, so music was my tool for escape where I could be in a world away from my reality.

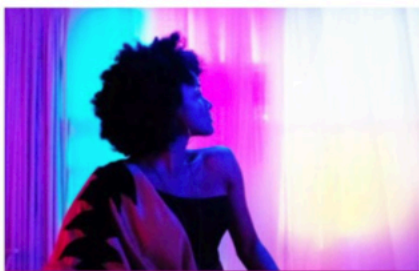
**How welcoming has the LGBTIQ community been to you?**

The community has been beyond welcoming! Organizations like The Unique Woman’s Coalition, FLUX, AMAAD and the Aids Health Foundation along with the freelance LGBTIQ creatives in this country have welcomed me with open arms.

**In 2020, the world seemed to be going through some huge changes. Do you feel we’re now heading to a better place?**

I certainly hope so. A pattern I’ve notice, though, is that just when things look like they’re progressing in a positive direction, something occurs that sets





## KYLER'S TRANSITION: "BEAUTIFUL, FREEING...AND LONELY"

We asked Kyler, who identifies as trans, how the journey of transitioning has been.

"Beautiful, self-actualizing, educating, freeing and also... very lonely," Kyler said. "I've reached a point where I'm comfortable enough in my skin to live and express myself much more openly than before I transitioned."

"It's a never-ending journey of self-love and self-confidence and learning, and I'm much better than I was before, and continue to grow. There's a lot of self-discovery and life lessons, like how embedded misogyny is in the social constructs we live by."

"From a dating standpoint. It's been really difficult for me to meet a guy who's interested in me on a long-term romantic level. Sadly, trans girls are often sought after for sexual experiences, or sampling, and nothing more. I've had some beautiful encounters that eventually led to me getting ghosted or blown off."

"I actually created an Instagram blog where I vent about my trans journey called @TgirlProblems. I invite you to check it out! It's pretty fun and insightful."

Is Kyler currently dating anyone?  
[Giggles] "I'm not, so if you know anyone..."

things back a few steps. It's been beautiful to see all of the unity that's taken place throughout the country [USA], which gives me hope.

**Have trans rights changed for the better in your opinion now?**

Yikes! I can't say I'm politically savvy enough to give this one a thorough response. It's good that "trans-ness" is a known topic and not some unheard-of conundrum it once was among cisgender heterosexuals. The more we learn from and about each other, the closer we get to total unity.

**What are the issues that are closest to your heart?**

The misrepresentation and exclusion of black women in mass media, the systemic constructs

that negatively impact our society and keep us divided, and... my love life! [Laughs] Yes, it's an issue, if not the closest issue to my heart. The dating hardships of transwomen in the USA in 2020!

**Your song, *Satan's Tears* is such a beautiful piece of music.**

The melody and hook came to me in a dream. I wrote the rest of the song about a month later on a flight to Cincinnati, my hometown.

**There seems to be a lot of anguish in the title though, is that fair to say?**

Very much so.

**Tell us about the stunning choreographer/choreography in the video?**

Incorporating dance into the video was the idea of the director, Andrew Lush, inspired by Kate Bush's *Running Up That Hill* video. Andrew really connected to the lyrics of *Satan's Tears* and wanted to tell a story through dance, so we collaborated with dance instructor Isabelle Sjahsam who guided us in creating the choreography.

**Is there an album to follow?**

There is an EP in the works. The release date remains TBD for now. Since I pay for my music production work out of my own pocket, and things can get costly, I have to budget wisely. But I guarantee you, my EP is coming.

**How would you describe your music and your inspirations and influences?**

My music is non-conventionally expressive. I like to share my inner feelings via my works and focus more on the unpopular thoughts than the opposite. My musical influences include Whitney Houston, Shura, Jhene Aiko and H.E.R. Sound-wise, I like to play in the worlds of acoustic and electronic.

**Who were your childhood idols?**

Whitney Houston, Beyonce, Xena: Warrior Princess and Joanie Laurer (Chyna).

**You grew up in a very religious household.**

**How are things with your family?**

All is calm. All is bright. We had a rough start at the beginning of my transition but there was enough space and time to learn and grow together. I'm thankful for my family's unconditional love and desire to be a part of my life.

**Are you planning to be the trans Madonna?**

[Laughs hysterically] I certainly wasn't planning to be but hey, who knows?! If it happens, it happens.

**What do you think of the work of Mykki Blanco and other trans artists?**

It's awesome. Mykki, along with other trans artists, are getting exposure and showing the world a norm that's different to the norm that the mass media has oversaturated us with for so many years. It's amazing!

**Where would you like to be in five years' time?**

Alive? I'm always unsure of how to answer that. The life expectancy of African-American trans women in the USA is 35\*. We're either murdered or commit suicide by that age. I guess



in an ideal world, in five years, I'd be married with a couple of kids and with a successful artistry career where my family and I can live comfortably. I also want to buy my mom a house, a brand-spanking new house.

**What do you need to tell the gay men reading this magazine about trans rights and transphobia?**

Trans rights are human rights. Sound familiar? Transphobia, like homophobia, is never okay.

**What did you make of JK Rowling's recent writings on trans people?**

Although I've never read a *Harry Potter* book or watched a *Harry Potter* movie, I have some good friends who were into all that and were heartbroken by JK Rowling's recent statements. I can't say I was surprised though. Even though I can't relate to this particular case, being heartbroken by someone I admire or felt inspired by is nothing new for me. I enjoy hip-hop and rap music but there are many songs in the genre where trans and queer folk are shunned in the lyrics. It's so regular.

**What's your message to the world?**

Love each other. I get it, we can be afraid and hesitant, but we're so much more alike than we realise. There's no need to get caught up in the "who's-better-than-who" race. And also, black women are just as beautiful, feminine and desirable on a romantic level as everyone else.

**MORE:** For more go to [kyleroneal.com](http://kyleroneal.com) or on Instagram @KylerzWorld. *Satan's Tears* is available on all music and streaming services.

## Q \* Fact Check

The statistic that the average life expectancy of trans women in the USA is 35 has been quoted in dozens of media but is not accurate. The figure appears to originate from a report compiled by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2015, which found that 80 per cent of the trans women who were murdered in Latin American countries were 35 years and younger. This figure can't be extrapolated to include the USA, and the report also doesn't mention the average lifespan of trans women who are not murdered. However, the Human Rights Campaign in the USA has confirmed that at least 34 transgender or gender non-conforming people have been killed by violent means in 2020 and the majority were Black and Latinx transgender women. The level of violence against trans people is disproportionately high compared to the general population.

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