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Starmer on
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**Fjord
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to love
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**Out of
this
WORLD**

Singer-songwriter **Sam Ryder**
gets some space (man!) in Malta

FLIP TO DISCOVER FOOD, DRINKS & DUTY FREE SHOPPING IN OUR **CAFE. SHOP. BROCHURE**

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Sam Ryder, the wedding singer turned Eurovision breakout who has become one of British pop's best-loved singer-songwriters, heads to Malta for cliff diving, shipwreck snorkeling and a trip down memory lane

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SET YOU FREE





Sam in the square at Fort Manoel, wearing vest from Marks & Spencer, jacket from Scotch & Soda, trousers from &SONS and sandals from Birkenstock. Belt, sunglasses and jewellery Sam's own

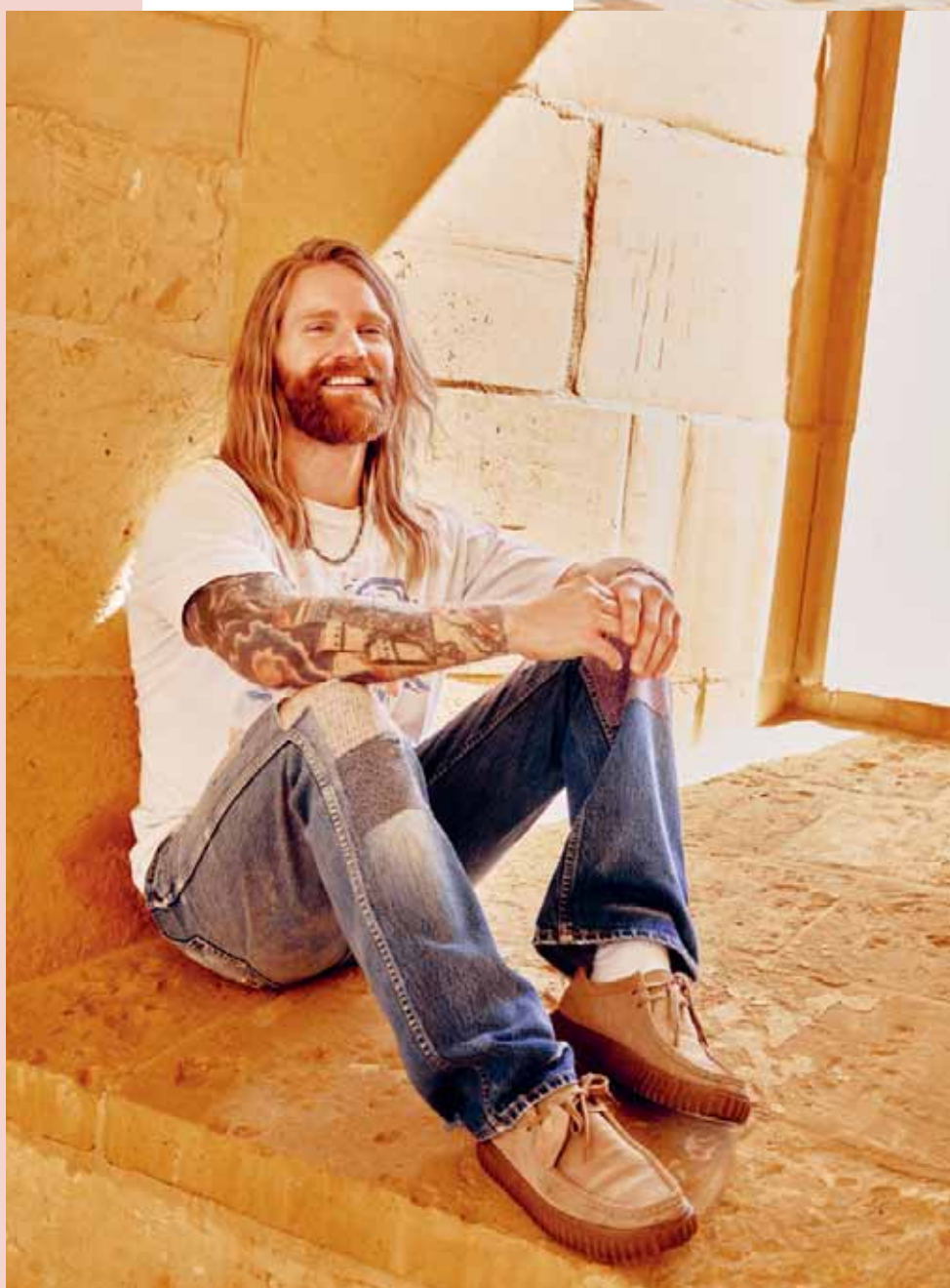
Sam Ryder is hesitating. 'I haven't cliff jumped in a while,' he stalls, tucking tousled blond strands behind his ear. The Brit-nominated singer is peering past his toes, looking over the edge of Comino's Crystal Lagoon. 'It's higher than it looks from down there,' he yells back to me, sitting comfortably in a small pleasure boat bobbing in Malta's clear waters roughly 10 feet below. I've no doubt he's right, but I'm not about to climb up and find out. I'm busy learning what makes the man who somehow went from an Essex wedding singer to Britain's favourite Eurovision entry, and ignited a career to include gigs at Glastonbury and the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, think twice.

I offer to count him down, but he waves it away, having somehow now found the courage to take the daunting plunge. He steps forward and transforms into a strip of flesh-coloured stone, thumping into the blue water with a splash. There's silence, then he breaks through the surface, head shaking droplets from his lion-like mane, smile splitting his face and a delighted 'Olé!' rebounding off the rocks.

As it turns out, it takes more than a sheer drop to keep Sam dry, especially here in some of the Mediterranean's most picturesque waters. 'I'm a Cancerian,' he says, hauling his tattooed torso back on board, 'so swimming is a big deal. If I can play a show and jump in the sea straight after, I'm in heaven.'

It's one of the reasons he loves Malta so much, a place he fell in love with after first visiting for a gig in

**'MALTA HAS
AMAZING FOOD,
AMAZING HOTELS,
AMAZING PEOPLE
– THEY CAN'T DO
ENOUGH FOR YOU'**



Sam wears jeans from WAX London, shirt from Wrangler, sandals from Birkenstock and vest Sam's own. Left: Jeans from Rokit Vintage, shoes from Clarks, T-shirt and necklace Sam's own

GET OUT THERE



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2022. 'We sound checked, then me, the band and the crew jumped in the water, had a quick swim and were like, "Right, we're on stage in 30 minutes."' It's clear pretty quickly that the 36-year-old's 'golden retriever' reputation is warranted. He radiates delight, heard in his gasps of surprise as we snorkel over the wreck of a patrol boat near the Blue Lagoon, or press footprints into the sand on a hidden beach at the back of a cave: 'It smells like a Disney water park!' he exclaims.

As our boat weaves between the towering honey-coloured outcroppings, 28°C sunshine warming our wet skin, Sam tells me how his best friend at school, Dan,

was Maltese, and how he'd always envisioned Malta when reading about the fictional city of Cittàgazzo in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. He's also a huge fan of the Mediterranean archipelago for its hospitality. 'Everyone has treated us with such warmth and made us feel welcome. Plus, there's amazing food, amazing hotels and amazing people – they just can't do enough for you.' The islands have practical appeal, too: shooting social and video content isn't 'a massive palaver'. 'Literally me, [his partner] Lois and our photographer Jack just get on a plane quickly, rent a car, shoot something and come home,' he explains. 'It immediately looks different to what everyone else is doing, because we have that freedom and speed of movement to make it possible.'

As a cinephile, Sam appreciates Malta's appeal, having provided sets for *Game of Thrones*, the *Jurassic World* franchise and Ridley Scott's ►



Vest from Marks & Spencer, jacket from Scotch & Soda, trousers from &SONS, sandals from Birkenstock and belt Sam's own. Below: Vintage T-shirt Sam's own

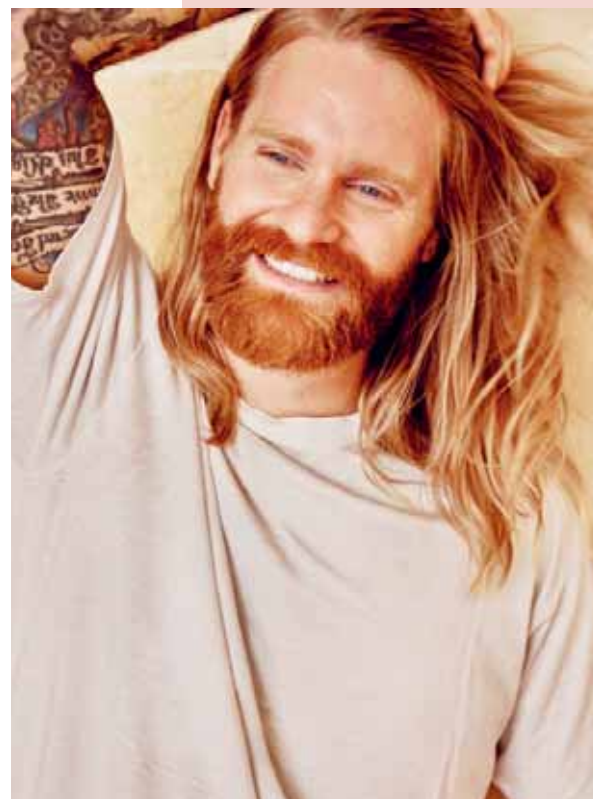
'IF I CAN PLAY A SHOW AND JUMP IN THE SEA STRAIGHT AFTER, I'M IN HEAVEN'

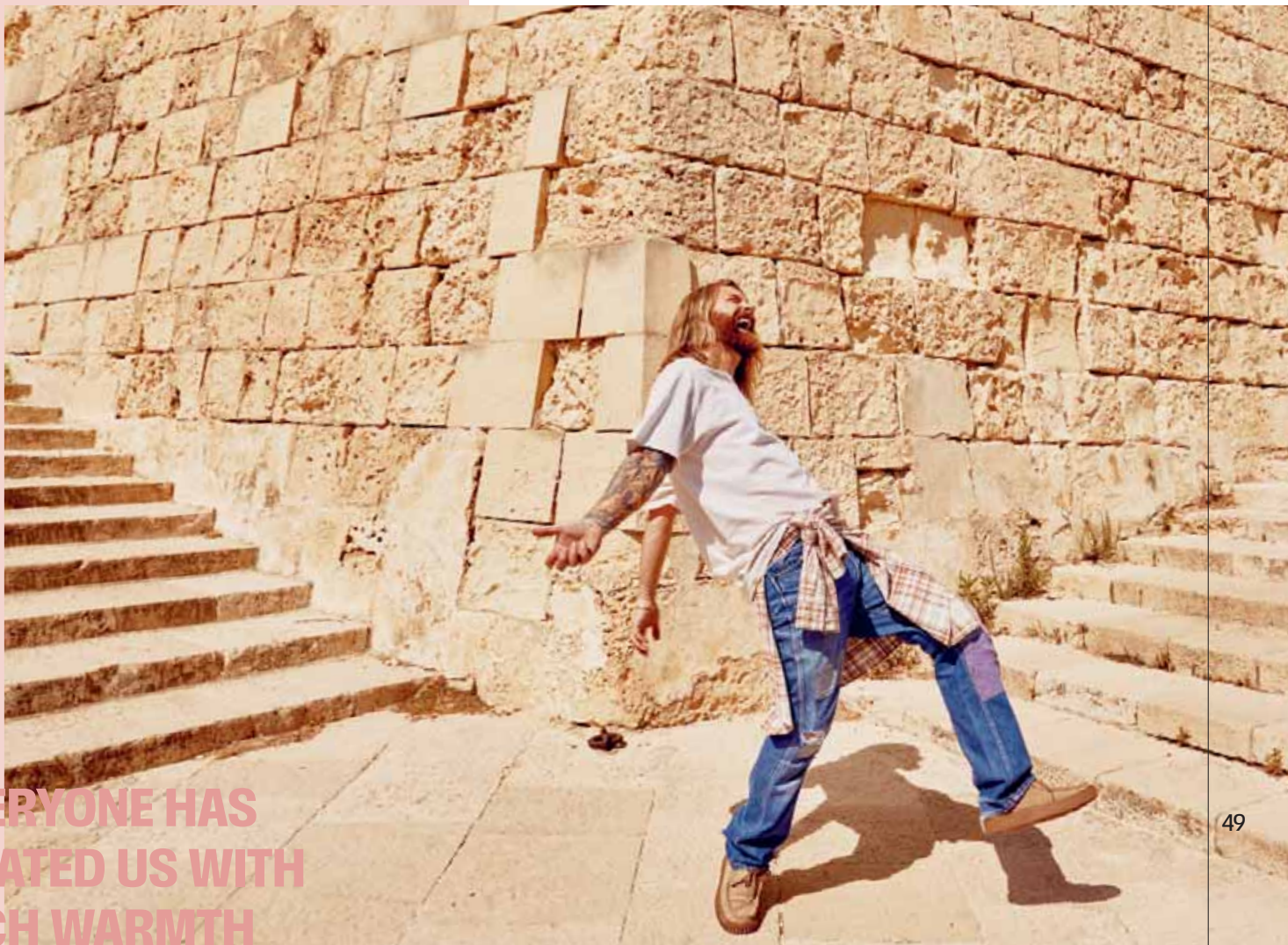
Gladiator films. 'I'm really into old westerns,' he shares, remembering a recent trip to Almeria to see the sets of spaghetti westerns he used to watch with his grandfather. 'You could definitely shoot something akin to that in Malta. It's got the right palette: not too saturated yellows or greens, it's nice to photograph'.

Sam's love of westerns translates to his new album *Heartland*, which, like *Space Man*, accentuates Sam's dramatic vocal range but is infused with a western-inspired sound he likes to call 'frontier soul'. 'Don't get me wrong, it's not like the opening credits to *The Magnificent Seven*,' he explains, 'there's hints of it. Like the *Olympic 89* intro has an Appalachian singing style, while Nancy Sinatra was a big influence on the drums and the vocal sound. It's dusty, in a good way.'

What's clear from chatting to Sam is how much he relishes the opportunity to travel – whether just for himself or as a showman in his own right. The singer's first tour for his debut album, *There's Nothing but Space, Man!*, took him all over Europe, to the 'little cobbled, winding streets' of Salzburg and people-watching in Porto, his first experience of 'real, European culture'. At one point he even considered moving to Switzerland as he enjoyed the experience so much. 'Montreux was glorious because you can snowboard in the winter and then be back down by the lake in an hour, plus, everyone's really respectful and nice – and it's super clean.'

His lifelong love of travel began in earnest on a family holiday to Egypt, aged 14. 'We took the night train to Cairo, which was an experience,' he recalls. 'I remember walking through the souk; everyone was rubbing my hair because it was bright blonde and they thought it was good luck. It was a feast for the senses. I remember seeing the Egyptian men running the stalls and getting cash out from under their galabeyas to give you change.' The holiday was inspired by Sam, who was studying Egypt at school, and whose parents, he's sure, were keen to foster interests beyond music. 'Before, all I was into was music, so maybe they were like, 'He could be an archaeologist and might actually do something with his life!' But it was a love of science fiction, not archaeology, which spurred his ►





**'EVERYONE HAS
TREATED US WITH
SUCH WARMTH
AND MADE US FEEL
SO WELCOME'**

Above: T-shirt,
Sam's own,
shirt from WAX
London, jeans
from Rokit
Vintage and
shoes by Clarks

interest in Egypt: 'I wanted to see where the aliens were!'

In his short and stratospheric rise to fame (he now has 14 million followers on TikTok and by the time you read this he will have sold out OVO Arena Wembley), Sam's garnered a reputation for being boundlessly positive. He's called himself a 'joyful person' who's in the 'golden age' of his life. It seems unnecessary then, when at the start of the shoot, he's asked to smile. 'What? Get my easyJet out?' he jokes. In our nearly two days together, I can recall few moments when his even white teeth aren't carving a line through his well-groomed beard.

He's certainly terrific company. En route to Fort Manoel, a military

bastion built by the Knights of St John and the location of his easyJet photo shoot, he debates with Lois whether *Persuasion* or *Sense and Sensibility* is Austen's best book. As he folds his body into one of the fort's huge, rock-hewn ledges, I'm struck by how he fits in, metaphorically and literally — and not just because of his limestone-hued locks. He exudes a 'meant to be here' ambience.

It turns out this 18th-century fortification is particularly poignant, as it was the venue of his first Maltese performance. 'I was swimming over there,' he recalls, pointing to the bottom of the building's imposing steps and brilliantly sapphire waterfront, the towering walls of Valletta a few hundred metres offshore. 'Then I did the show to 3,000 people; I couldn't believe it. Why would that happen?' he remembers. 'Malta's been such a cool country for us to come and play. Walking around with this ►

EXPLORE MORE

beautiful view when there's no stage and no dressing rooms; it's really cool in its natural state.'

And walk around he does, dipping his head into deserted rooms, wandering off down stairways, ducking into shaded alcoves. Thankfully, we can't lose him. He's a walking jukebox, the sounds of Billy Joel and Dolly Parton leaving melodic breadcrumbs for us to follow. They're just a few of the artists on his 'Channel Surfing' playlist, his favoured soundtrack for a day in front of the camera. Conversation evolves into the trips he's still to make (even

bestselling artists have bucket lists, it seems), which include returning to Egypt for a Nile cruise to Abu Simbel – 'I know the wardrobe I'd bring with me: I'd want to feel like I was in an Agatha Christie novel.' Iceland is also up there, inspired by a viewing of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and the influx of Icelandic culture into the UK in the 2010s. He even would love to go to Milan and experience opera in its birthplace. 'I really want to get dressed up and enjoy entertainment the way people used to'.

Our shoot draws to a close. The photographer calls a wrap and within seconds Sam is shedding layers and racing beneath Malta's sun to the water's edge. I hear a splash and then quiet, before ripples of familiar laughter trickle back up the staircase. Sam Ryder is home. ■
Heartland by Sam Ryder (Artist Theory) is out now. Thanks to the team at Fort Manoel, Richard Mifsud from MIDI plc, Visit Malta and Hotel Barcelo Fortina Malta. Book your private boat tour via outdoorexplorersmalta.com



Below: Sam wears vest from Marks & Spencer, jacket from Story mfg, trousers from

Carhartt @ Rokityvintage, shoes from Clarks, and sunglasses and jewellery Sam's own

'MALTA'S BEEN SUCH A COOL COUNTRY FOR US TO COME AND PLAY'

