# Celebrating Holly Johnson: a new exhibition



Photo: Trevor Leighton

The 1980s in Britain was a period marked by social and political upheaval that paved the way for a full-scale cultural revolution. This era, characterised by the electric sounds of synth-pop and experimental music, sprouted a rich diversity of subcultures—including punks and new wave bands. At the vanguard of this creative explosion was Holly Johnson, a figure whose influence continues to resonate today.

To commemorate the 40th anniversary of Frankie Goes to Hollywood's seminal album, 'Welcome to the Pleasuredome', an exhibition titled *The Holly Johnson Story* delves into the life and career of this iconic artist. The album, featuring unforgettable tracks like 'Relax', 'Two Tribes', and 'The Power of Love', remains a symbol of the bold and rebellious spirit of the '80s.

Produced by Homotopia, Duovision Arts and National Museums Liverpool, in collaboration with Johnson himself, the exhibition provides an in-depth look at his journey. From his beginnings as a young musician to his rise as an internationally renowned star, openly gay and navigating the complexities of fame, the display captures both the triumphs and tribulations that defined his path.

Johnson's narrative is one marked by numerous challenges. Facing a diagnosis of HIV+ and the associated stigma during an era when understanding and acceptance were limited, he managed to remain a monumental LGBTQ+ icon. His story is one of resilience, grappling with negative media portrayals while courageously forging ahead with his solo career.

*The Holly Johnson Story* conveys a tapestry of polarising emotions, seamlessly weaving glamour and sexual liberation with themes of fear, loss, and stigma. It not only highlights Johnson’s experiences but also gives voice to the broader LGBTQ+ community who lived through the 1980s. The exhibit illuminates the gay scene of the time and reflects on the devastating impact and enduring legacy of HIV.

This thoughtful and comprehensive exhibition honours Holly Johnson’s creative genius and ultimate contributions to music and culture, while also offering an essential historical perspective on the LGBTQ+ experience. Through curating the narratives of individuals who lived through the whirlwind of that decade, it ensures their stories remain vital and instructive for future generations.

**The Holly Johnson Story, Museum of Liverpool, 14 September 2024 - 27 July 2025, liverpoolmuseums.org.uk**