



The KING of Music Video Parody

Primed for global domination, Weird Al Yankovic --the biggest-selling comedy recording artist in history-- resumes his Mandatory World Tour.

Words by Vanessa Pascale • Photo Credit: Robert Trachtenberg

If you were an MTV-addict in the 90s like I was, “Weird Al” Yankovic’s music videos are likely rooted in your memory. Who can forget “Amish Paradise” and “Eat It” (parodies of Coolio’s “Gangsta’s Paradise” and Michael Jackson’s “Beat It,” respectively)? He is legendary and the biggest-selling comedy recording artist in history. So, you can imagine the distress I am in when Jay (Weird Al’s manager) ushers me into Weird Al’s hotel room ten minutes late (thanks, New York City traffic). Thankfully, he is completely gracious and immediately puts me at ease with his calm demeanor. He has retired his glasses, mustache, and short curly mane famously donned earlier in his career. Today, he is clean-shaven, glasses-free, and dressed in a long-sleeved, dark gray button-up with black pants. His hair: bangs-free and shoulder length.

The four-time Grammy-award-winner arrived in Manhattan last night to do Howard Stern’s Sirius XM radio show this morning. (Weird Al posted their photo together on social media and captioned it: “Definitive proof that we’re not the same person.”) Weird Al is making his press rounds to promote his 76-city Mandatory World Tour spanning the next four months --a continuation of last year’s 5-month tour. “We’ve had time to visit our families and live our lives and now the tour continues. We get on a plane beginning of June and then we’re out until September 24, which is our date at Radio City Music Hall. Then, we’re officially done with the Mandatory Tour and it will probably be the end of touring for quite some time.” Weird Al and his band perform a 2-hour rock show that encompasses his new album, greatest hits, and a few surprises. “We try to make it as theatrical as possible. There’s costume changes for practically every song. You see me in the fat suit, dressed up like Kurt Cobain, like an Amish guy, a Jedi Knight... We just try to give people their money’s worth.”

Weird Al’s 14th studio album, *Mandatory Fun*, features 12 tracks including “Word Crimes” (parody of Robin Thicke’s “Blurred Lines”), “Handy” (parody of Iggy Azalea’s “Fancy”), and “Tacky” (parody of Pharrell’s “Happy”). These were among the eight videos he released over eight consecutive days in 2014, which went viral and garnered him his first #1 album. “I knew when I was releasing my last album [*Mandatory Fun*], MTV was not a factor. It hadn’t been a factor for quite some time, like a decade or two,” he laughs, “but the internet was alive and well, and the internet is where people go to see their music videos these days, so I figured if I were to come up with a campaign that focused on getting people’s attention on the internet, that might work. And I was very surprised and delighted that it did.”

A truly great strategy, did you expect it to be so well received? “No, you obviously hope for the best

and you try to promote something as well as you can, and create something as good as it can be. But you never ultimately know how people are going to react to it. My last two albums got on the Top Ten and this was going to be my last album. I felt it was a really strong album. I thought this is a good shot at the Top Ten. But being #1 was something I never would’ve even allowed myself to want,” he laughs, “I mean, that’s not meant for people like me. I’m sure you’ve read all the statistics; last time a comedy album hit #1 was over fifty years ago. I still have a tough time wrapping my head around it.”

And if that wasn’t impressive enough, “Word Crimes” became his fourth Top 40 single, making him the third artist after Michael Jackson and Madonna to have a Top 40 single in each decade since the 1980s. “It’s crazy. I never thought I’d have a career doing this. This is just something I did to amuse my friends and I was excited to get some airplay. I was excited to get a record deal. But nobody in the industry, not even myself, thought that I’d still be doing this in 2016. A lot of the people I was making fun of in my early days are no longer with us, one way or another. I love what I do for a living and I can’t think of anything I’d rather do. I just feel very grateful and hashtag blessed (we laugh) that I can still do this.” When you’ve come this far, it only makes sense to release a career-spanning box set, which Legacy Recordings will do in a year or so. “My whole catalogue has just been remastered.” The set will include all 14 studio albums, an album of rarities, unreleased B sides, and early unreleased music, he tells me.

Though there are over 10,000 people (his estimate) now putting out similar parodies on YouTube, Weird Al remains the king. You paved the way, I gush. “I won’t argue with you there.” He laughs. “Yeah, for years I had the market virtually to myself. I mean, I was certainly the only person with a major label record deal doing funny songs, and music parodies. I definitely, over the 80s and 90s, became a brand name. In fact, when Napster was at its peak and people were trading files indiscriminately online, every single funny song was by me --whether it was or not. ‘That’s Weird Al!’ So I got the credit or the blame for a lot of horrible, horrible songs.” Just today a guy asked him about a Britney parody that he never did.

He developed a reputation for producing comical music while attending California Polytechnic State University. His friend suggested that he submit his “stupid music” to radio broadcaster Dr. Demento for him to play. “He played 4 hours of bizarre music.” The songs were a hit with Dr. Demento, who encouraged him to send more. “They were horrible songs, badly recorded. I couldn’t sing. I could barely play the accordion...” To make the “Funny Five” was his ultimate goal. So when he found out “My Bologna” (parody of The Knack’s “My Sharona”) was #1 on the “Funny Five” for two weeks in a row, he was elated. “My life is never going to get any better than this,” he recalls thinking, and laughs. Boy, was he wrong.

By the time he graduated with his bachelor’s degree in architecture, Capitol Records had released his first single, “My Bologna,” nationally and he had established a solid cult following. He knew he wasn’t going to use his degree, even before he graduated. “I was having a little bit of an identity crisis in college. I don’t think I was ever super depressed, but my third year in I realized this is not what I want to do the rest of my life. This isn’t my passion. I’m not even really that good at it,” he says about architecture, which he pursued because his high school guidance counselor suggested it since he was good at math and design. “I thought, ‘That’s a good job for an adult, a serious person.’” But music and comedy were his passions, and luckily, he was able to combine the two into a career that has surpassed his wildest dreams.

Fans can play with Weird Al soon too. He has been immortalized in the form of an action figure (slated for release in the next year or two). “The first one, they give you the option of two heads: the current Al head and the iconic 80s Al head with the glasses, mustache, and the bangs.” While he’s no longer a fixture on MTV, you can still find him on television. In recent years, he has appeared on *Galavant* as the Confessional Monk and as himself on *The Goldbergs* and *How I Met Your Mother*. You can watch him now on the fifth season of late night talk show *Comedy Bang! Bang!* as the band leader-cohost. “Scott Auckerman is the host and has all sorts of celebrity guests on but he asks them the stupidest questions in the world... I’m basically a sidekick. It was a lot of fun.” And he’s the voice of Milo Murphy on Disney XD’s *Milo Murphy’s Law*, out this fall. “Milo Murphy is the great-great-great-grandson of the guy that Murphy’s Law was named after. So basically he’s a walking jinx, but he’s got a great attitude about it.”

Weird Al’s career has been full of extraordinary wow moments. What takes the cake? “The #1 album, for sure. I’ve had a lot of wow moments in the last couple of years. Doing a big production number on the 2014 Primetime Emmy’s was a lot of fun. I’ve got two nights at the Hollywood Bowl, I never thought I’d do one night. That is 18,000 people a night. I’m doing it with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. And that kinda stuff happens now on a weekly basis. ‘I’m doing what? What’s happening?’ It’s pretty crazy, especially considering how my career started out in a bathroom with an accordion. It’s kinda hard to draw the line between that and the Hollywood Bowl,” he laughs.

Follow him on Twitter: @alyankovic Instagram: alfredyankovic YouTube: alyankovic Facebook: weirdal

For tickets to see *Weird Al live on the Mandatory World Tour*, check out www.weirdal.com – there is also the *Mandatory VIP Experience* including a pre-show party hosted by the Minister of Propaganda. *Mandatory Czar VIP Experiences* include all elements of the *VIP Experience* plus a Meet & Greet with *Weird Al*. For more information, visit: www.cidertainment.com/events/weird-al-yankovic-mandatory-world-tour-2016/



Creating a Winning Music Parody

When you're looking for your next song, are you searching the internet like, 'Who will be the next person?' What's your process like?

"When I'm looking for the next target, as it were, I'll listen to the radio a lot more. I will do research. I'll scan the Billboard charts and make lists of everything that's been a Top 10 song... I'll generate a lot of ideas and 99% will be horrible ideas. But hopefully one of them will be good, and that's all you need."

So you choose a topic and just go off of that?

"That's all I'll write until I get permission. Because I don't want to spend a lot of time working on something if the artist doesn't have a sense of humor about it. As soon as I get an idea I think is strong enough, if I can pitch it one sentence, then I'll call my manager and say, 'Go after so-and-so and here's the idea.' And historically, we've been able to get people to sign off on it just based on that. Lady Gaga's manager really put me through the ringer to get permission. And Lady Gaga was totally cool! That's my least favorite part of the job. I want to be ethical and get their permission, but sometimes, man, it's not easy." He laughs. "I had to basically stalk Iggy Azalea to get her permission." When her management wasn't responding. He showed up at her Denver concert, and was able to hang out backstage since he knew the promoter. "Her road manager was like, 'There's no way. Maybe you can talk to her in London next month.' As she walked off stage, I said, 'Hey! It's Al Yankovic. Look, I've got my new song here. I just want to know if you're OK with this.' She was a little startled, as a normal person would be, but she looked at the lyrics and she said, 'Yeah, seems fine.' I'm like, 'Thank you very much!' And I got on a plane and went back home and finished my album."

I read that a lot of artists look at your songs like a badge of honor.

"Yeah, that's exactly what Lady Gaga said when she finally got around to actually hearing it. Kurt Cobain said he didn't realize he made it till he heard the Weird Al parody. Most artists get the joke and have a good sense of humor about it. The people that usually cause the