

# Pacifistic Revenge

— Andrew W.K. —

I'm tired of people telling me they don't give a shit. I hope I never meet another apathetic, cynical person as long as I live. Of course, I know that won't happen. I meet them all the time. I feel as if I am living in a world full of them. Cynics. Smartasses. Opportunists. Jerk-offs. Hipsters. Clowns.

Cynics are very close to me, always. My dilemma is in finding a reason to keep going, despite the odds that no one gives a shit; in knowing that much of the human race *is* cynical, holding back the believers and contributing to the long-term menace in today's culture, and especially in sub-culture. Such people, it could even be argued, are the very reason why influential scenes, projects, and ideas all die within relatively short periods of time.

I'm generally a sympathetic person, with a rather unfortunate knack for attracting desperate people. I allow drunk, inbred bar cretins to waste my time simply because I can relate to their poverty. Chances are, they won't say anything in the slightest bit interesting. Chances are, I've been giving the precious seconds, minutes, hours of my life on Earth away to imbeciles for quite a few years, but this guy slurring in my ear, let's call him Emmet... well, even he is preferable to some washed-up punk rock fashion victim or arrogant underground celebrity.

Emmet's company may well leave much to be desired, but at least he's *for real*. Regardless, he smells bad and has the vocabulary of an Adam Sandler or Ernest P. Worrell. I don't mean to sound arrogant myself, but I'd rather talk to someone who *gets it*. It would be nice to think that there are millions of these people in each and every major city... generally, you're lucky to even find a dozen.

The first time I heard Andrew W.K., I felt like I'd been injected with some kind of brand new drug. I *got it*, in the greater sense. I'd been waiting for this kind of purity, this kind of energy, this kind of honesty, for what seemed like decades. I fell head over heels in love with his debut record *I Get Wet*. Unlike a lot of nebbish music geeks, I took the record with an extreme seriousness. It was simply meant to be. It was not to be questioned. Hit me like a fucking sledgehammer.

After so many years of underground and mainstream rock icons feigning Ultimate Anguish And Intensity on stage (while amusingly Precious and Delicate in the flesh), I'd grown sick and tired of these skinny ass white boy whiners, these punk rock *enfant terribles*. I wasn't the only one who felt this way. But, as I say, we're a minority within several other ones.

Then along comes this guy Andrew. Since his full-length debut and follow up *The Wolf*, it is much easier for me to believe in miracles. I'm infatuated. In my own personal opinion, Andrew W.K. provides something that others can't, couldn't, won't: that something being light at the end of this long, depressing tunnel. He's one of the most visceral, exciting things to have happened in music since the Sex Pistols. Also, Andrew gave me great advice about women, and about just being a person in a world, a society, a culture, that is rapidly losing respect for its own artists, and for humanity in general.

I don't have much respect for humanity. *Homo sapiens* generally cause me fear, neausea, or depression. I'd like to be a better, kinder person. Andrew W.K. made me consider this. His music changed me, and knowing him, if only for an afternoon, that changed me too.

Andrew W.K. will never give up on his music, which is to say, music itself. He speaks of music in much the same way churchgoers speak of God. All human beings, at some time or another, lose themselves in the fear and panic that result from questioning an existence which seems to lack all meaning. W.K.'s got a lot on his mind, probably a lot more than you do. W.K. is asking the big questions. And his approach is relatively fat free, compared to the whining of your average apathy-stricken twenty-something. Music is his way of both simplifying those larger questions, and answering them.

After reading this interview, you'll know that as well as I do. But let's just say, hypothetically, that he did give up on music. The strength and dignity and beautiful morality of this person damn near guarantees him a career in professional advice. I may not agree with everything he has to say 100%, but there's a bigger picture to consider here, and in that bigger picture, he's fundamentally aware of everything which would make this world a better place to live.

He's right fucking on.



**Gene Gregorits:** It seems that with you, intensity is an end in itself. To make the loudest and most powerful record.

Andrew W.K.: Yeah, and to find new ways to do it. There are things that are untouched, I think. By the very nature of our lives, it is original. If I can embrace that, and not even react to what else has happened or is happening, then maybe I can just do what I'm doing, and do it as *all the way* as I can. That will be my best shot at being me. It becomes a work ethic, where you say, "what's going to be original about this, is that I am going to work harder than anyone has ever worked." That, in itself, isn't original. But to think that I'm just going to do my best, for me, took a lot of the stress out of having to come up with some *idea*. I just said, "well, here's my idea, whatever it is. Good or bad, old or new. I'm doing it as much as it has ever been done, if it has been." That makes it more comforting, because it makes it more about me as a person, and other people, rather than written ideas or descriptions. More about experiences, and feelings, which makes it bigger and more relevant to reality as I see it... If there's an event that happened... the event itself is not so much what is important, as how people reacted and felt, when that event went down.

**GG:** How does the experience of your shows differ from the experience of hearing the record on a really good stereo at full volume? What would you like people to come away from the shows feeling?

A W.K.: Well, I do think that it makes things clearer, to see the show. I just base it on what people say, and I'm sure people have different views. It seems that when people see it live, they have an increased appreciation for it... see, that's the thing, I don't know if there is anything to understand. It's not whether you get it or not, you just feel how you feel about it. People are constantly trying to figure things out, and very often I think they figure them right out of being exciting anymore. If it can become something that is undeniable, or just takes over, overwhelms you, then you really become defenceless, and you don't have to worry about what it is.

**GG:** Being so primal that you don't have to think about it.

A W.K.: Yeah, and I think that the live thing really makes that clear, and very easy.

**GG:** You really tear yourself up doing those shows, I imagine. The intensity of them is widely known. How do you keep up the pace?

A W.K.: I don't know, because it's only been a very brief period so far. I see bands that have been playing concerts for twenty years and they're still pretty intense. You take it on a day to day basis. I think that there are people who play more intense shows than I do. I set a personal standard, that if I do not feel completely physically spent at the end of the concert, then I have not done well. If you have goals like that, that you can apply and achieve on a daily basis, it gives you, if not

satisfaction, then a sense that you're at least doing the minimum. There's bands that have made their *vision* in the spirit of GG Allin...

**GG:** It's strange to hear you talk about GG Allin, because there are similarities between you and him.

A W.K.: [laughs] There cannot be another one of him. Well... I guess there could be. I personally would be very impressed if someone simply took it upon themselves to do that. But he took being a human being to another place that hadn't been seen otherwise in... I think, in the twentieth century.

**GG:** What is valid about living that life, to you, and how does that kind of deliberate, constant self-punishment fit into your own philosophy? I mean, we're talking about the most flagrantly self-destructive man in rock history...

A W.K.: [laughs] I don't judge people based on their beliefs so much, but rather on their commitment to those beliefs. And with GG... man, you really couldn't ask for more commitment than that. There are so very few things that are as real as that. I consider GG to be one of the most important people of all time, in music. There's no one else like him. He's everything that I would never be able to do. Or would want to be. And yet, I do relate to him.

**GG:** What specifically do you relate to?

A W.K.: His lyrics are so good. But I have always made an effort to just be myself. That's a quality I always appreciate in other people. That's what I value and look for. It's not easy. And at the same time, it's *really* easy. He was captivating. He just seemed like the scariest person in the world. That was exciting! That's why anybody likes him. He decided to be somebody and just did that, all the way. People might say, "he used drugs and alcohol to make things easier." But I think that was the point, to use all those things, for what they were worth. It's not easy to do drugs and drink, at all times. I would just like to know more about what he was thinking. That's the mystery. We'll never know exactly what was running through his head. He was incredibly smart, you know he knew what he was doing, and you know that he had thought it up. His early visions, his early plans and early recordings, were all based on something. He saw it, and he planned it out. That's amazing.

**GG:** You're doing that. So... where do you go after *I Get Wet*? Some people, when that came out, immediately took the attitude of, "where could he possibly go from this?"

A W.K.: When I made that record, I had never gone on a full tour around the world. I had never played live concerts to more than fifty people at a time. That was the first time I ever recorded in a professional setting. It was all very new. That record was recorded without a band.

**GG:** It was all you, on the record?

A W.K.: There were other musicians playing, but it wasn't played *as a band*. A drummer played separately, the guitar player played separately. On this new record, I did

absolutely everything. Every single thing. That worked out good. Oh, we had one background singer.

**GG:** So you just use a band for gigs?

A W.K.: There is a band, but that's the fine line we walk. There aren't many live bands that I know of who would give the level of dedication and hard work that these guys give. So at the same time, it's not just a hired live band. It's my band, it just so happens that I made the records.

**GG:** So why did you use other people for *I Get Wet*?

A W.K.: I couldn't play drums well enough. I couldn't play guitar well enough, at that time. It was all about quality. I don't get excited by the fact of someone playing everything. I don't even like talking about that. You won't see anything on the record like, "everything on this record was played by me." I get a little uncomfortable, because it defeats the point of what this is about. It's not about me. My whole thing is, I just want it to be as good as it can possibly be. And on *I Get Wet*, I knew that to make it the best it could be, it'd be smart to use other people. It took a really long time, because of that. You have to show them the part, teach it to them a million times, 'til they get it right. That's what made it good. This one is good because of me doing everything. There's not a lot of integrity beyond quality, so I don't have hang-ups about equipment, I don't have hang-ups about how it should be played, or who should play it. Now, there's a bunch of people involved, and it's about more than just me. The more that this continues, the less important I become in it. That's exactly what I dream of. There was so much attitude that I faced, and still face, where people almost pride themselves on not caring about what other people think. Assuming that they are above the opinions of others, or above their input. And I think that it takes – and I don't know if I have it all right now, but I'm working on it – a lot more strength and courage to say, "I'm going to take on everybody else's cares, or as many as I can afford to. Their cares, their opinions, and their values... and try to include it in what I want to do." I can actually say that I do care what people think, and I do care that if they don't like this, I'm going to be bummed out. It's harder! It doesn't make it easier! It's so much easier to say, "fuck it, I don't care."

**GG:** Outside of just trying to make everybody happy, what I like so much about your approach is that you are obviously striving for some kind of united reality, where people don't have to have such shitty attitudes.

A W.K.: United reality. That's an amazing way to describe this thing that I've been thinking about, more and more. It *is* a united reality. Because I feel that young people are going in that direction, despite what other people may think. That young people suck, or are doomed. No. We're gonna be just fine. As a matter of fact, the sooner young people start taking over, as far as I can see, the better. Now, let's talk about this 'united reality' thing. I think that, with so much information, people identify themselves basically with how they react to what's presented to them, rather than just how they *are*. I do that too. You define yourself by

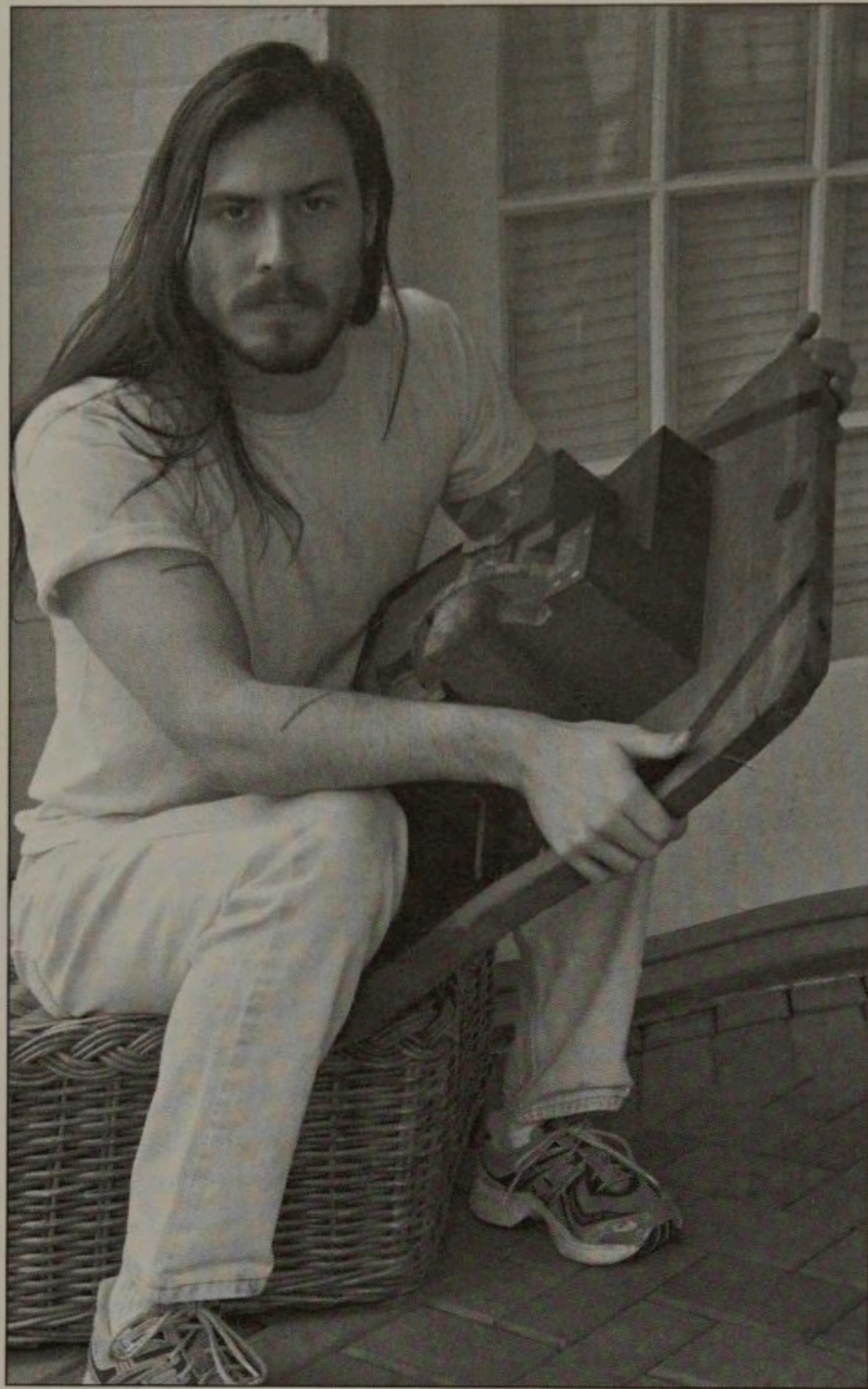
"I set a personal standard, that if I do not feel completely physically spent at the end of the concert, then I have not done well."

what you weed out of what is presented. Who I am is what I decide is okay, from what is presented. As opposed to who I am, maybe just amidst all this. It seems that there has been a resurgence of the defiant, because of how much has been shoved down your throat. Well, let me take that back. I don't think things are shoved down people's throats. I think it's all up to people, and if you can be strong enough to take it on, nothing's being shoved down. You allow it to be shoved down or you don't. I hear people priding themselves, in a glamorized way, that being apathetic to what's going on, while creating their own world, is somehow superior to those that just live in the world. That if I can make my own private little world, where everything I do is great, and I get to work on my stuff all the time, and I don't have to worry about what's going on outside of it, I'm going to be safe, I'm going to be good, and no one can touch me. That to me, seems like the biggest cop-out. It's so appealing though, because it *is* easy.

**GG:** Saying that would seem to alienate you from other performers. How do you feel about the fact that that attitude separates you from them, and from the very idea and definition of what it is to be a rock star.

A W.K.: I don't care personally for what the idea of a rock star means. Someone who lives very excessively for no other reason than to just do that. It doesn't accomplish anything except entertainment value for others witnessing it. But I don't have anything against rock stars. And I'll be that for someone, if that's how they want it to be. There are other people doing that. It's been done, it's covered. Great. Let it go. Like it, love it, whatever. But... *we're* doing *this*. And if this isn't quite as exciting in those ways, that's fine, because it's even more exciting in other ways. The same way as, it might be more exciting to go and hang out with some famous actress, but at the end of the day, you're always gonna want to go and hang out with your best friend. And that is what I want this music to be. And I would like to fill that role, and be that kind of guy. I wanted to fill that role, because to have those things in life is extremely rare, and also, I think, very important. It comforts.





**GG:** People seemed to pick up on that pretty quickly. I've checked out some fan letters on your site, and I think people are getting what you do. And then there are people who just don't think you could possibly be serious. Does that frustrate you, that people won't just say, "it's great" or "it sucks", but "he's not for real"?

A W.K.: If I am too wrapped up in my own mind then yeah, I will get frustrated with that. I have no right to be frustrated by that though, because if I am going to be honest with myself, then I have to admit, I was not only anticipating that kind of response, but I was almost excited about it. Of course people are going to respond that way! I get driven by what I feel threatened by. I'm driven by what I don't like, and I'm driven by competition. Any negativity I find in the world or in myself, I use that to push forward. If I open a magazine... the bad things I used to avoid, because they'd put me in a bad mood. But now, I just use it to push me ahead, to stay up an extra three hours and get something done. New York has a ton of that. There are so many people here, of all different kinds, and you've gotta meet people that you don't care for, and it forces you to think about yourself a lot more... and become more accepting, at the same time. I just feel that from living here, I really learned a lot, about how to deal with stuff.

**GG:** I'm not a social person, so I was glad to get away. Living here made me terribly self-conscious.

A W.K.: Self-conscious is a *good* thing! Self-aware. 'I am conscious of myself'. I don't think that's bad. Being aware of yourself is the first step to knowing who you are, and improving on it. Hopefully, you never stop that.

**GG:** It's amazing that you were doing your stuff in New York, and managed to avoid getting bitter. That's miraculous, I think.

A W.K.: That's not even important anymore. What's important is that I have to get this recording thing done, tonight. I have a meeting tomorrow at noon. And I have to get groceries. Those kind of thoughts, that do nothing but slow you down, can be put on the back burner. What ended up becoming my entire mindset, was that there is no end result I was looking for. There's a lyric on the new album where I say, "I made a mission my goal, a vision my job." The mission of this *is* the goal, and the goal is not an end result. The mission itself, the undertaking in itself, *is* the goal, to just keep doing it every day. To keep working harder. There's nothing better than waking up in the morning, knowing that I can *do* things today, and put hard work into it. Hopefully it benefits someone other than myself. You can help yourself and help someone else, too. It's the beauty of being human.

**GG:** Okay, so how does an angry and hateful song such as 'Ready to Die' fit into your generally exuberant attitude? Is that song aimed at anyone in particular?

A W.K.: The way I thought of it was, this country's pretty easy. Most neighbourhoods and most cities and most towns don't deal with life or death situations, beyond car accidents and health issues. But there are certainly neighbourhoods and cities where people live in war zones. I thought that if you could apply that level of intensity into your daily life... as in, if I knew I'd die today, would I be living that day like it *was* the last? That's where the idea came from.

**GG:** "You're just a parasite, now close your eyes and say goodnight." Pardon me for saying so, but that sounds very personal.

A W.K.: Yeah. But I think I was talking to myself more than I was talking to somebody else. On that song, I wasn't thinking so much about what the lyrics meant so much as I just wanted to have something that felt good to sing. It was exciting to me to have a song that was very good natured... and then to have a song that completely flipped it. Just because it made it bigger... you know what? Everything I've been talking about for the last two years, and everything I've learned, because of what I've experienced, that's led me to become a different person, and a better person. That's what I want to sing about, and that's what I feel I owe to the people that have caused that to happen. And the people that support the same thing I love, which is music... I think there's a lot of people who somehow, despite a bloody nose on the cover... and

despite a song called 'Ready to Die'... they came away like you did. With "this makes me feel good", "this motivates me", "this inspires me." I have been as honest as I could possibly be on this album. People have said I am much more open on this album... see, I was trying to write lyrics that would make me break down and cry. That was the level of intensity that I wanted to be at. Then there are also people who will say, "I don't care for these lyrics. I'm not like that." That's the risk I took, because I know it's gonna make people uncomfortable. It challenges you to become better, if you're really gonna believe in it. The people I've met through doing *I Get Wet*... I am just floored by how much they love it, and how much they've put into it. I even feel awkward talking about it because I don't want it to seem like I'm bragging. But it has inspired me beyond any level of inspiration I've ever had in my life. How much this has meant to people. And how I didn't anticipate that at all. I would have been happy if I'd met a few cool fans. Talked to people who said, "oh yeah, great songs, and I love it." But the reaction I got was so intense, that it literally, fundamentally changed me as a person. I think that is a rare thing. I don't think that people are changed by other people very often. Again, it was coming from a somewhat lonely person. It was coming from someone who wanted nothing more than to be in a band, and play concerts with people. And we've gotten to do that. That dream was realized. I just wanted to give all that back. I am so flabbergasted by the level of intensity people who like this bring to the table... and I wonder, "is this normal? Do other people get this?"

**GG:** It's probably not normal. You didn't happen in a conventional way. You've been very expressive about your ideas and your world views. Your website is full of your writing, so... I think that people have had time, since that record, to absorb and process all that. I think you just broke through to more people over time. I've talked to people who've attended your concerts, and they rave about it like it was some kind of evangelical experience. Because your music seems driven by a desire to unite people.

A W.K.: Does it? That's a great compliment. Thank you.

**GG:** Maybe you'll spawn a cult of nice, unconceited people! [laughs]

A W.K.: Right. Well, it's getting going! There's these fans, who I can't say enough good things about. They're organizing this convention, and that's what I want this to be about. I want all the little things that even people I work with look at and say, "oh no! You don't wanna do that!" No. We gotta do everything! If I don't do everything, I'm going to know that I didn't do everything! If I *can't* do everything, that's one thing. But if I *could*, and I don't... that's when I'm not going to feel very good about myself. I am just obscenely fortunate to have people like something that I like... and that they like it this much. All the stuff I said on the first album, I had to explain it to people later. But now, this one doesn't even

need an explanation. It's all said right up front. What I'm wondering is, how are people going to take it? I put it all out on the line. No holding back in any of these lyrics. The criticism I've already had is, "well, this is cheesy, these kind of lyrics." But the reason they think they're cheesy is because they don't have the strength to face something that is maybe more emotional...

**GG:** I imagine that you would be just as excessive even if you weren't successful right now. Is knowing that you're gonna die one day your main reason?

A W.K.: That is exactly the reason! On top of that, I think that's the one thing that makes originality, or any of those things which are up for debate... it makes them obsolete.

**GG:** I think it's important to always be your own man, no matter what, but there's also something petty about that stuff.

A W.K.: It makes them petty, because at the end, you understand that it is all about effort. It's all about how hard you try.

**GG:** What you get out of just being alive.

A W.K.: Yeah. If you're a guy who is a bricklayer, you're a bricklayer! You're not changing the world. But you can say, "I'm going to be the best bricklayer that I can possibly be." That's what this comes down to. It just so happens that this thing which I have chosen to do is up for a lot more critique, when it comes to content. Because it *is* content. It has soul. See, people often ask me if I am religious. There's a lot of Christian hardcore people that identified with *I Get Wet*.

**GG:** They were drawn to you looking for a spokesman for their beliefs.

A W.K.: Yeah! And I was blown away! I'm very honoured by that. I'm not a religious person, but I respect religion, and value all the good things that it has... and I abhor all the things it does that are absolutely absurd. But I understand where it comes from, and have compassion for even its bad qualities. Because it's *passion*. And whether it's GG Allin or a mass murderer...

**GG:** Or Jesus Christ.

A W.K.: Right! It's passion that makes human beings so fantastic, and amazing. Whether it's those passions and emotions that drive people to do horrible things or not... I guess it's all relative. But that's what I appreciate about religion. It's die-hard! People go overboard with it.

**GG:** The most extreme people out there are often religious people.

A W.K.: I'm only going to go more in that direction. Now it has a direction to go. And it will become more clear. At the same time, it will probably evolve on its own. I feel that as much as the last record was either loved or hated, I think this one's going to be even more extreme. I did not set out to do that, in fact I set out to make a more acceptable record, a record my mom would like more. I wanted it to reach more people. I can't deny that I am excited to see people start tearing into it and tearing it apart! Because then, it will be so obvious to me that, if



you don't like this, you're just not comfortable with these kinds of things! Which is straight up, unadulterated, uninhibited pleasure. As I see it.

**GG: Do you ever want to have a mansion or a limousine? Are you an anti-materialist?**

A W.K.: I don't have a lot of stuff. I find that things, for me, are easier without a whole lot of stuff. I found it's better to spend money on experiences. I put a lot of my own money into touring. I found that that benefited more people, other than just me. And I myself benefited, ultimately more deeply than buying stuff. At the same, I really appreciate and value something like a limousine. It's awesome! I've only ridden in one a couple times, and it's always been a fluke. When we went to the airport in LA, there was a limo parked outside our building. I was like, "is that *ours*?" I didn't order one, I would never order one! I never fly first class. Because I always feel like spending money in productive ways. Just because I wouldn't buy something doesn't mean I'm not gonna be like, "man, this is awesome!" I appreciate that stuff. For me to not appreciate it would be dishonest. Any person that likes this music, I would imagine that they would think it was pretty cool to ride in a limousine, or to live in a fancy house. But just because they don't have it doesn't mean they wouldn't appreciate it.

**GG: It's not as if you haven't earned it. You were struggling for years. And what's more, you were doing the early records alone. *Girl's Own Juice* was 100% you, right?**

A W.K.: That was 100% me. This new record sounds more like that one. I was worried, because there's so many great guitar riffs on *I Get Wet*. On this one, there aren't so many guitar chords. It's all about leads. it's all about melody.

**GG: You're a classically trained pianist. You write your songs on the piano.**

A W.K.: Yes! Yeah, I write all my songs on the piano.

**GG: How do you think that affects the way that they eventually come out, as opposed to working them out on a guitar?**

A W.K.: That's a very good point! And I never thought about that until the guitar players in my bands pointed these things out. "That's so weird", they'd say. "These parts are so weird!" The way I actually play guitar, and the way I played it on this album, entirely, is I take off the two thinnest strings, the highest ones, and leave the other four. I tune that to a chord. It makes this great chord that you can play with just one finger, basically, meaning that you're just sliding around on that neck. It's really hard to play that way, but I got really good over the years because I never had the patience to learn chords when I first started playing. That was really stupid, and I regret it, but I could still learn chords. At the end of the day, it was really good to just be able to play immediately. I can make a chord with one finger a lot easier than I can with three or four fingers. I think that the piano playing just gave the music the kind of sound that it has. What the left hand would play on the piano, that's what the bass would play, on a bass guitar. And that's what the guitars follow. And all these piano chords, they just voice out particular sounds that the music has. That's what makes my music sound the way it does. And you don't even really hear it. You hear it a lot more on this record though, because there are a lot more keyboards on this album. There's a lot more tracks, making this album thicker than the last one.

**GG: I read about the recording process of *I Get Wet*. I'm alienated by technology, but for some reason I found that to be fascinating. Laying down these countless track layers. It seems you took that as far as it could go...**

A W.K.: There's a lot of tracks, yeah. This album was like 100, 110 tracks. The guy who mixed it, Dave Way, has mixed stuff for Michael Jackson and Christina Aguilera. I chose him because he was very versatile, as well as being very technologically sound.

**GG: To record each track separately... that must be time consuming as hell.**

A W.K.: Oh yeah.

**GG: But why?**

A W.K.: It just sounds different. There's a certain thing about it, and what will sound confusing to most people, it

would seem like it defeats the point, is that you don't *hear* it! With fewer things, you hear more. With more things you hear less. But that's exactly the point. I don't necessarily want someone to hear a guitar part, and a bass line, and the little piano chords.

**GG: But rather, just one mass thing.**

A W.K.: Not even as a wall of sound, but just something that is cranked up, like "REEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!" [laughs] You'll see. It happened in a really innocent way, it wasn't a theory or anything. But I'm the type of person who, if I had the ability to record a lot of tracks, I would. And I did. I could always find one more thing to put in there.

**GG: So it's like a techno-alchemy, or a technological fusion... An independent force, a sound almost *without* instruments.**

A W.K.: Exactly! I don't want it to be about the instruments. I want it to be about this music. The song. As big and as loud as it could possibly be. And I don't mean loud as in punishingly loud, but like *glory*. Triumphant music, that just overwhelms, so you don't have the ability to use your brain, and pick out each part. It just does what it needs to do.

**GG: Well, as someone who employs a lot of technological methods, what are your feelings about the role of technology in music, how it relates to your music, and to music in general?**

A W.K.: When music was first discovered by humans, it was probably as exciting as fire, and the wheel. Maybe not as crucial at that point, but equally mind-blowing. Here's a string they pluck, and there is a tone. Then they divide that string in half, and it's an octave higher, divided in other ways, it becomes different notes. They developed music. It must have been a non-stop commitment to progress, and make better music. Not just for the sake of progressing, but because they felt so honoured to hear it. To make it. They wanted to do right by it. They work on it, making different instruments, better instruments, to play different kinds of things. It evolves that way. Like, the pipe organ. I can't imagine what people must have thought when they first heard that. Using it to pay tribute to the divine, because this is probably our best connection to the divine, and the way this feels. So they just continue on that way, and continue to be inspired by it, and to make it better. They invent electronic instruments. That takes us up to now, where we have computers. And it is always to make it better. Pointing towards the possibility that maybe, if we just keep working at this, and we keep developing it, and letting it progress, someday maybe we'll get that one perfect song. Music purists who say that music reached a pinnacle at one time or in one place, basically are disgracing the entire concept of human progress. And to put a finite end on any human element, whether it be music, or any other creative production, or any humanistic quality, to put a finite limit on it and say, "this was where it was at its best", defies all logic, which is that everything is always moving forward. Whether it's an insect, or a



plant, or a human! Things will always reach an ultimate better end, and in the end, well, it won't even stop there.

**GG: So it's about evolution... but also, you see the basic role of music in theological terms, almost.**

A W.K.: It's about finding something. Something that's bigger than you, and what you can conceive of at the time.

**GG: For me, music is about the moments where I get a sense of something being pushed open. I have my favourite songs, like everybody, but most of my favourite songs are my favourites because they have a few of those moments. I may not like *all* of the song. I'll hear that moment, and think, "if they could just keep that, and hold that note, and push it further, that would be the perfect song."**

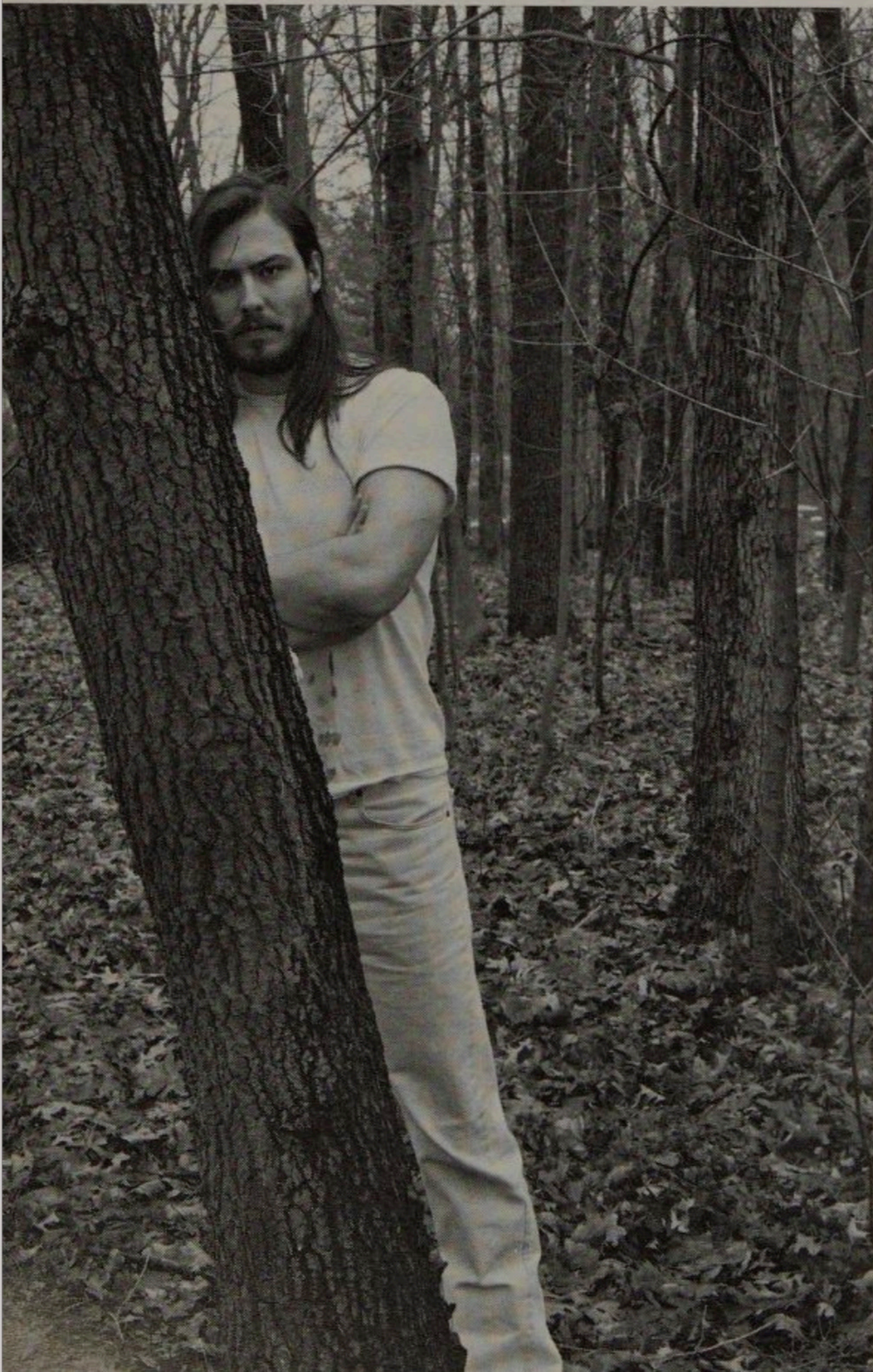
A W.K.: I agree. There are people that have actually said, "you gotta have parts in the song that aren't very good to make the really good parts stand out."

**GG: But to have something that would hit you right there, every second of the track...**

A W.K.: Oh boy. Yeah. That's the goal.

**GG: ...it'd have to be a totally new kind of music. It couldn't even *be* traditional rock music.**

A W.K.: Okay, then let's do it. I'm always behind. Meaning that... if I was going to sit down and write a new record now, it wouldn't sound like this. At the same time, this new one, I am absolutely dead set on putting it out. Because you can get so far ahead of yourself that you never end up doing anything. Because the minute you've stopped thinking on an idea, you've already thought up a





**"The adrenaline you get from being scared? That's really empowering. You get high from it."**

new one. So you've got to commit. You've got to put it down. So that's what I try to do. But man, the next album... I don't know what I'm gonna do. My goal isn't necessarily to make a structural breakthrough. I just want people to enjoy it, and not be confused about the fact that it isn't a simple structure. I was asking a lot of people during the making of this record, "Does this make sense to you?" And they're "yeah it does!" And it's weird, because by the time I got to the end of song, I realized that there wasn't really a chorus, there wasn't this, there wasn't that, but you don't notice that because you're just with it as it's going. It's very repetitive. It drives the same point home over and over again. Why say it once, when you can say it a hundred times, and just make it more intense? I try to find new ways to say things, but you can say "I love music" a hundred times, and it never gets any less meaningful. And that's what we're trying to do.

**GG: It's important to be repetitive, I think, if you really want to change things.**

A.W.K.: Absolutely. It has to be beyond the shadow of a doubt. I want there to be no question.

**GG: I like that you avoid irony. I think irony usually encourages people to sneer at one thing or another. It's easier to be ironic than to just face something head on.**

A.W.K.: It's a cheap shot. It's an easy, below-the-belt blow that doesn't take a lot of work. It can still be fun or whatever, I guess.

**GG: I think people find it more important to be in on a joke than to actually give a shit, in the end. I think that, to be un-ironic, is to be non-conformist.**

A.W.K.: I agree. But again, I won't hold it against people. There's that line you cross where you just start worrying about every little detail, making it a pretty miserable experience. You walk away from it feeling very unhappy. I always try to allow myself to let go of those things enough to feel good about it, so it's still enjoyable. If you're always upset with how things turn out, and the process is not enjoyable... this is your *life* you're living, and time is going by so fast. You're always anticipating being happy, when you get something right. Well, I want to be happy as I'm doing it too.

**GG: I guess you don't get depressed very often, then.**

A.W.K.: I get depressed. It doesn't last long. I won't allow that. I have bad days, like anybody else. I've got too much to do, to be really upset about something. I don't have any

real reason to be upset. Moods and chemical shifts will happen, to me and anyone else. But if I just do a quick inventory check of what my life consists of, I don't believe that I have very much to be upset about.

**GG: Also, you're very young. It's coming back now, young people becoming successful as musicians. In their twenties. It seems that, for a long time, people were making it big in their thirties.**

A.W.K.: It is very youth oriented these days. I don't know if people identify with me as a young person, or if they see me as being very young. People sometimes seem surprised when I tell them how old I am. I'd like to think that it isn't an age based appreciation. I don't have any hang-ups about age, and I don't have anything against people that are older. I have nothing but respect, in fact. I just hope that it continues to stay youth *driven*, but for everybody. I hope people that are older don't feel embarrassed about liking music that's targeted towards young people. Sometimes I'll meet someone who says, "I'm the oldest person at your concert, don't think I'm weird!" I'm *honoured* that they're there. I don't think they're stupid for being there, I think it's great that they came. I wish more older people would come.

**GG: John Waters is a big fan of yours.**

A.W.K.: Awww, I was so excited when I met him! He came to see us in Baltimore.

**GG: He told me that he drives around in his car, listening to 'Party Hard', and people look at him, headbanging at a traffic light.**

A.W.K.: Now that's a compliment! But... yeah, John Waters. There's a guy who is just so inspiring. He's very driven, and just does what he wants. That's exciting to see. There's no one else like him, he's awesome. And so nice. He's one of those people you talk to and just seem comfortable with, right away. I made an idiot of myself, because I was nervous. I meant to say *Desperate Living*, because that was the first movie of his that I ever saw. But I think I said, *Heavenly Creatures*. I don't know what I was thinking. It was just some kind of weird mix-up in my head. I called him and left him a message, apologizing. I realized ten minutes after he left, "oh my GOD! What an idiot! Why did I say that?" What was so weird was that he didn't even correct me when I did it! He just laughed, and thought I didn't know what I was talking about. But I really did! My friends are obsessed with John Waters. So I felt very honoured to be the one meeting him. I told him, "I just want you to know, I have so many friends that just live and die by you and your movies, and it's a great honour to meet you on their behalf." I get to do so many of these things that my friends wish they could do. I always try to remember that, and do it for them, to do it the way they would do it. To never underappreciate any of these things. I have friends who play in bands, and worked just as hard as I have, for years, and haven't been able to do these things. There are people everywhere who put their soul and every bit of effort they have into doing something that just doesn't pan

out. But I will never take a second of it for granted, and I want people to know that, because it sucks if someone who is doing something you wish you were doing doesn't appreciate it. That's another reason why, when I get to do something, I want to do it all the way. Because I think that that's what that other person would do too, if they had the ability. So they know and I know that I'm not wasting it.

**GG: How involved are you with your own videos?**

A.W.K.: I'd always had these ideas, because I had so long to dream of what music video I would do. A lot of those ideas were probably not very good. I just wanted them to be very basic.

**GG: I think that 'She Is Beautiful' is the best video. It's hard to miss the self-reference there. You're basically riffing on your own life, on your hopes.**

A.W.K.: Yeah, that's true!

**GG: What's so immensely great about 'She Is Beautiful' is that it is specifically about a woman. Was it written about anyone in particular?**

A.W.K.: All these songs I worked on for so long, and then I would get re-inspired. You know that part, [*singing*] "I ain't got nothing to lose, I'm gonna"...

**GG: THAT'S IT! [stuttering and spitting] Wow, man... yeah, that's it! That's my favourite part! See, that's what I was talking about. Remember, when I was talking about those moments in songs? That's exactly what I meant. That's that moment, where the song just... explodes with emotion. A perfect climax! But it's not really, because the second time you hit that verse, that's when I just get completely high.**

A.W.K.: That's great. That's what I like to hear, because that really is the whole point of that. And that's a point in the song, that just couldn't have come earlier. That song was just about seeing a girl in a store, you know, she smiles at you. Or on the subway. And... not even being able to say hi. Blowing it. So... the song is basically a fantasy. I'm *saying* I'm gonna do it. I don't say I'm doing it in the song. I'm *going* to do this. But I kind of never do, really. And I rarely have.

**GG: It sounds so fucking easy to do, but [laughs] it's not, really!**

A.W.K.: It's not! And that's what I was working with. "Okay, this is gonna be great. I'm gonna do a song about this."

**GG: It's an amazingly powerful song and when I first heard it, it seemed like I'd been needing to hear that song all my life.**

A.W.K.: Thank you. People tell me that that song has made them ask out certain girls, and that that is who they're with now. That, to me, is mind-blowing!

**GG: It's great you can be so optimistic, yet talk about being shy and stuff.**

A.W.K.: You never overcome any of those fundamental parts of your personality. You just don't give up, and try to overcome them. And in a way, you do overcome them. They can always come back, but you just choose to not

respond to them. All those things that are going to slow me down or hold me back, or keep me from doing all that I could, it just comes down to being afraid, it always does. You just say, "you know what? I'm just not going to give in." I think the most exciting thing is when you realize that.

**GG: Yeah. Ask her out. But you look at it like this, right? The girl's had a really shitty day, and there you are, and she's thinking, "Oh yeah, that's all I fucking need. Christ!" [laughs] I don't mean to play Devil's Advocate, or to be a cynic, but there are things which must be considered.**

A.W.K.: I can relate to that too. Yeah, the last thing she wants is to be bothered. But... you know Eugene Levy, the comedian?

**GG: Yeah.**

A.W.K.: He was at MTV Studios the same day I was there. I'm thinking, "oh man, I can't believe he's here, I really would love to just say hi to him." Every chance I've gotten to meet someone I really love, all I want to do is say, "what you've done is amazing, I love it." That's what would make me feel good, to just tell them. But with him, I was like, "I don't want to bug him, he doesn't know who I am!" He ended up coming up to me and saying, "I really love your music." He knew who I was! I was absolutely flabbergasted. I think it's important to remember that you never know, on one hand. Far too often, I hear from really beautiful, amazing women, that they wish guys would ask them out, and that no one ever does, because they're afraid to. It goes both ways. I think that far too often, we convince ourselves that the thing we're afraid to do is probably the wrong thing to do anyway, because of X, Y, and Z. But so what if you annoy 'em? At least you tried.

**GG: My excuse now is that I shaved my head a few weeks ago, because I'd decided to become a monk. Now I go out anyway, but I'm that bald guy.**

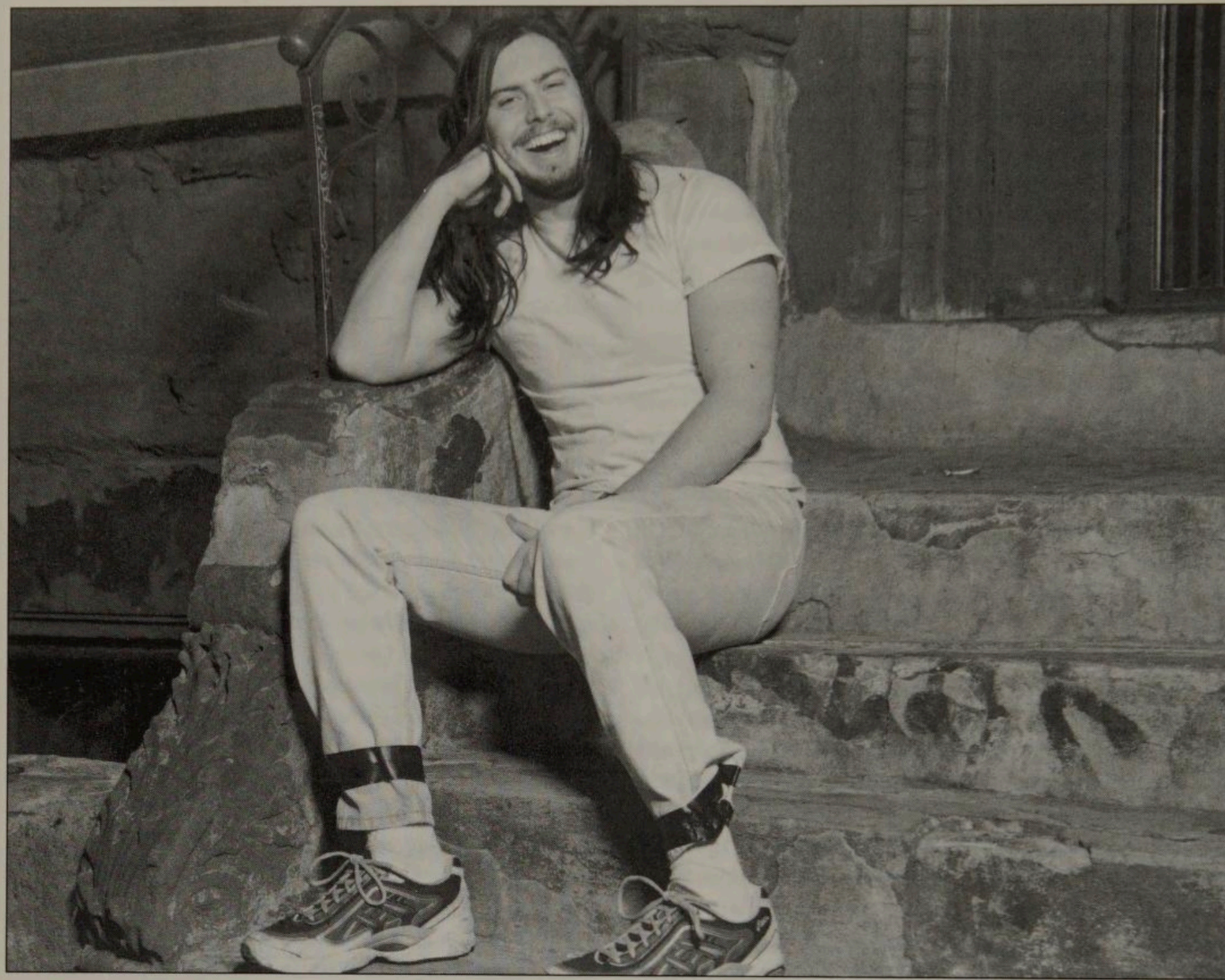
A.W.K.: I used to shave my head.

**GG: Yeah? Your hair is too much a part of the whole W.K. thing. You can't shave your head.**

A.W.K.: No, I can't, really, and I don't wanna do it. That's the thing, though! That's what I'm saying. Push it! Throw it out there! Just when you thought everything is all fine and dandy and this is who I am, and I'm speaking just for myself... I'm totally thinking do it! Make it uncomfortable, make it freaked out. Make it scary to do, because that is such a great feeling. That feeling you can get from doing stuff like that, whether it is thought based, or going and talking to a girl. The adrenaline you get from being scared? That's really empowering. You get high from it. I just think that there's a way to live that allows you to not be a complete miscreant and disregard all things that society has set up, but at the same time, to have fun with it and realize that it all really is kinda inconsequential. You can use the realization of the lack of consequence to get where you really need to be. And once you're there, you can then go back and say, "it really *does* matter, and I'm glad I did it."



## Midnight Mavericks



**GG: How often do you listen to your own stuff?**

A W.K.: I guess, when we're on tour, since we're playing it every night, I don't. But every now and then, I'll put it on. You have to consider that there are literally thousands of hours spent on recording the stuff...

**GG: One five second bit of your music, yeah... that amounts to so much time spent. So many track layers, one after the other...**

A W.K.: This time, I hired a professional backup singer, to do these harmonies and things. I sang with him, just to get one more different voice. But the group vocals on this, I did them all myself. On some of the last songs, which were the most complex, and that's why I saved them for last, we did about 600 vocal takes. We break it down, word for word, so it's the best. Instead of singing a whole line, I'll sing half a line. Just get a few words, to make it as good as it could be. You get into a dangerous game there, because at the end, when you have a thousand tracks and a thousand things going on, you're not going to hear that level of detail, but you hear the mentality.

**GG: Creating a monster.**

A W.K.: That's right. And that monster, you may not see its bones, you may not see the blood running through its veins, and you might not see its guts... but you can see it

exists because of what is inside. So just because you'll never hear that little vocal thing that I spent two hours on, you get a sense that it *is* there. It really does make a difference in the end! Whether you hear it or not. That's what I love about a lot of music! Especially music made for young people. The standard by which they make music for young people is so exceedingly high, and the production values are so through the roof. Yet the audience is one which would never appreciate or hear those things, or even *care!*

**GG: Do you think your audience cares?**

A W.K.: I really don't know! As many interviews as I do, it's rare that we talk about the music in particular. I hope people like it! I hope it doesn't become that big of an issue. I hope it sounds really easy. Look, I put all those thousands of hours of work, all those vocal takes, all the recording, and all the figuring out how the music is supposed to go... but you can listen to it, and it sounds like it was just made like *that*, BAM! It's not difficult music. It's the easiest music, as hard as it was to make.

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