

## Feel the Terror: Andrew W.K., December 5 at RIBCO

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Tuesday, 01 December 2009 14:17

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I have no certainty that the person whom I interviewed late last month is the real Andrew W.K., or the original Andrew W.K., or even that Andrew W.K. as a human being (as opposed to an entertainment entity) exists.

But the guy who called me introduced himself as Andrew W.K. and talked a good game, and he'll presumably be the man performing as Andrew W.K. at a benefit show Saturday at RIBCO. So we'll go with it.

"When someone says you're not a real person, or you don't exist, or that your life is a lie, that's a very strange feeling," he said.

If this sounds a little odd, you've likely not encountered Andrew W.K. I first saw the man on *Saturday Night Live* in 2002, and the spectacle was so bizarre that it had to be a joke -- some mix of Andy Kaufman's dry meta-comedy and Spinal Tap's sharp musical satire. I was fascinated and bought his record

*I Get Wet*

. My wife considered divorcing me.

That performance of his signature anthem "Party Hard" involved tons of blasting guitars, a lead piano, spastic and unnatural arm and leg choreography by Andrew W.K., and lyrical concepts and rhymes no more sophisticated than the song title. But it had great hooks and an infectious, harmlessly self-contained fury.

The first thing to stress is that Andrew W.K. is not a simpleton. Despite the brain damage that the majestic, full-throttle cheese metal of *I Get Wet* suggests, the man talks intelligently about the artistic choices that went into that major-label debut.

Andrew W.K. said that there was "a high premium put on density. ... There's not a single track of any of the sounds on the record. So if there's a snare drum, there's more than one playing. If there's a kick, there's more than one kick drum. If there's bass, there's more than one bass.

"I wanted to get the sound of the song, not the sound so much of instruments or performances ... but just the sound of music. When you heard a voicing, you didn't hear a particular person's voice so much. ... You heard many voices, in fact, one of which could even be your own, included in advance. It sounds like maybe you're already singing along to the song ... . I wanted to eliminate that sense of individuality ... ."

Since then, Andrew W.K. released a second album (2003's *The Wolf*), had a show on MTV2 (*Y our Friend, Andrew W.K.*

), became a motivational speaker

[featured in the  
\*New York Times\*](#)

, opened a nightclub, started a record label, and hosted the Cartoon Network show *Destroy Build Destroy*

, now in its second season.

His third album, *Close Calls with Brick Walls*, was released in Asia but only came out on vinyl in the U.S., the result of legal issues that Andrew W.K. explained in the vaguest of terms. (He said that confidentiality agreements with "creative directors and people that came up with concepts

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with me early on" kept him from being more forthright.)

He finally released a new CD in the U.S. this year, but it's a collection of solo improvised piano pieces. (In Rock Island, he'll be performing with guitarist Matt Sweeney and drummer James Lo [both of Chavez], as well as with a separate backing band, so one shouldn't fret about a quiet night of solo piano.)

And around this bizarre career swirl [questions about the authenticity of Andrew W.K.](#) And accusations about the authenticity of the questions swirling around the authenticity of Andrew W.K. -- the idea that the conspiracy theories are part of the marketing. Several Web sites devoted to exposing the "truth" about Andrew W.K. promise clarity yet lead one into an inescapable maze of cryptic and confusing language.

My best guess on this mess: The idea and aesthetic of Andrew W.K. the performer were developed through collaboration, and very real legal issues involve whether the man who is Andrew W.K. has the right to release CDs under that name without giving credit to others.

"*The Wolf* is what started the issues developing, and it had to do with credit," Andrew W.K. said. "Something as little -- literally -- ... as type and letters printed on a CD case, in the liner notes ... became a boiling point, and everything else went into the pot."

The primary reason I believe Andrew W.K. is real -- i.e., that it's not a joke to him -- is the new *5 Cadillac*, which is so earnest and unadorned and unlike *I Get Wet* and *The Wolf* and *Close Calls* that it will undoubtedly alienate his fans. Unless he's *seriously* Kaufman-esque, there's little choice but to take it at face value, as something he simply wanted to do.

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That Andrew W.K. chose to do a piano album isn't surprising, as Andrew Wilkes-Krier began taking classical-piano lessons at age four. But "the type of piano album ... may have been surprising," he said.

He called it "my first chance not only to do a new album worldwide but also my first chance to do a new album completely on my own terms. ...

"That sense of freedom had really made an impact on me," he explained. "I wanted to fully embrace the most terrifying parts of everything I could do. Meaning, the parts that potentially were the most humiliating or embarrassing or potentially could be a disaster or could be really scary."

He entered the recording process, he said, without any preparation, "with the full realization that it might not be quote-unquote good. But I was less concerned about that than I was with it being exactly as it is. ... I wanted it to be the sound of me playing piano, but not playing anything in particular."

And, he said, releasing it "was the most important part. Because I wanted people to feel the terror. I wanted people to have that feeling when they're listening to it that I have no idea what's going on, and neither do they. They don't know what's going to happen next, and I don't know what's going to happen next, but something *is* going to happen next, and we're both going to experience it."

That idea of experience is central to Andrew W.K. Even though throughout his career he's worked with familiar structures and instrumentation, the music is somewhat alien and presented without even the suggestion of a mission statement. Some audience members can be confused "not knowing what the intention is," he said. That means they're forced to listen.

Yet Andrew W.K. said he doesn't understand the befuddled reactions he often gets: "They happened just as much when I was doing something that I thought was very straightforward and very easy to grasp and understand. At times I've tried to make things as straightforward as I possibly can so that the experience can be the focus, and the sensations, the physical feelings that you get ... ."

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*Andrew W.K. will perform on Saturday, December 5, at RIBCO (1815 Second Avenue in Rock Island) in a benefit show for the Quad-City Times Wish List program and sponsored by [Daytrotter.com](#)*

*. The bill also features Mac Lethal (featuring DJ Sku) and School of Flyentology. The show starts at 8 p.m., and tickets are available*

*[RIBCO.com](#)*

*and*

*[teamdaytrotter@gmail.com](mailto:teamdaytrotter@gmail.com)*

*. Tickets are \$12 in advance and \$17 at the door.*

*For more information on Andrew W.K., visit [AndrewWK.com](#) .*