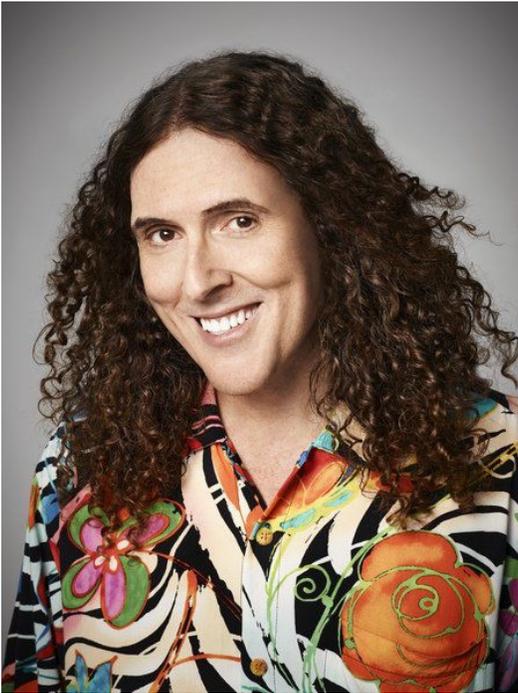


Polka, Parodies and Cheese: A glimpse into "Weird Al" Yankovic's world

By Zachary N. Simmons, *Correspondent*

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Courtesy photo "Weird Al" Yankovic unleashes his brand of humor on the region in two shows next week.

Wielding an accordion like a thunder god, "Weird Al" Yankovic is blasting his way into the region next week as part of his 80-venue Mandatory World Tour.

The tour follows up "Mandatory Fun," his first No. 1 comedy album since 1963. Can polka medleys, songs about grammar, and a nine-minute insight of a man's fantasy on a bus do this? It did and the tour is going strong.

"Weird Al" is known for his comical, clean-cut song parodies and he's been enjoying success in the genre since the late 1970s, when Dr. Demento's radio show was jettisoning out Yankovic music like "Yoda" ("Lola," The Kinks).

The '80s and MTV launched his mega-hits like "Eat It" ("Beat It," Michael Jackson). And today's music continues to yield Yankovic parodies like "White & Nerdy" ("Ridin'," Chamillionaire and Krayzie Bone) and his latest, "Foil" ("Royals," Lorde).

But Yankovic — the curly haired Californian synonymous with Hawaiian shirts and smirks — acknowledges "humor is a very personal thing."

He prefers his original songs, ones that are not direct parodies, which he said "require a lot more work and research." "Jackson Park Express" — a "nine-minute love song" off his latest album — is a favorite.

That's not to say Yankovic doesn't enjoy his parodies. Though not legally bound to ask permission, Yankovic does seek approval to parody a song, typically with affirmative results.

"White & Nerdy" stands as one of his top ones. While it has become his biggest-selling single, Yankovic said he didn't have to do a whole lot of outside research for it.

"I've been reaching the 'White and Nerdy' lifestyle my whole life," he said during a recent phone interview.

Constructing successful parodies and pastiches to hold one's attention can be challenging, he said.

"I've two or three rules that I live by in terms of parody writing," he said. "No. 1 is I feel a parody should be funny, even if you are not familiar with the original source material, even if you don't even know it's a parody ... it should make you laugh, it shouldn't be dependent on your knowledge of what it's based on."

Yankovic said parodies must also sustain humor for the entire length of the song.

"A lot of amateur parody writers think of a funny parody idea and the whole joke is the reveal of the pun in the chorus, but after that, you have nowhere to go," he said. "But a good parody not only builds, it's better in the second verse than it was in the first verse and better in the third verse than it was in the second verse."

"A good parody has got somewhere to go, it's got a train of thought that leads to more comedic ideas and never peters out."

Yankovic, who comes to Lowell and New Hampshire for two shows next week, deadpans when asked about the best part of coming to New England.

"Well, um, what I remember from whenever I play New England, they always have a really nice deli tray, the cheeses are usually cut into isosceles triangles, which is one of my favorite kinds of triangles," he said, laughing.

He added, "I don't get a chance, unfortunately, to go around sightseeing. Mostly what I see is the stage, backstage and the back of the bus."



"Weird Al" Yankovic's Mandatory World Tour lands in the region next week. | *Courtesy photo*

Yankovic lives with his wife, Suzanne, and their 13-year-old daughter, Nina. What's it like having him for a father?

The artist first jokes he hasn't told her about his career, before saying, "She's cool about it, she's very grounded and very adult like and she's got a good attitude about the whole thing. She's not awestruck by it, she's not jaded by it, it's just part of her reality."

"Weird Al's her dad, that's the way it's always been. She enjoys my music."

IF YOU GO

What: "Weird Al" Yankovic, Mandatory World Tour

When: Thursday, Sept. 1, 7:30 p.m.

Where: Boarding House Park, 40 French St., Lowell; rain location Lowell High School Auditorium, 50 French St.

Cost: \$58 in advance/\$65 day of concert/\$158 premium

Information: lowellsummermusic.com, weirdal.com

When: Friday, Sept. 2, 8 p.m.

Where: Bank of New Hampshire Pavilion, 72 Meadowbrook Lane, Gilford

Cost: \$39 to \$59

Information: banknhpavilion.com, weirdal.com