

Say It Ain't So, Al

The cat's outta the bag with Weird Al's *Straight Outta Lynwood*.

by MIKE WINDER

HOLD ON TO your butts. After three long years, Alfred Yankovic, the prolific artist better known as "Weird Al," has finally released a new album. *Straight Outta Lynwood* tackles topics as varied as computer viruses, frivolous lawsuits, the workings of an internal

organ and international copyright laws. All this, topped with a more personally revealing Al than ever before, makes *Straight Outta Lynwood* easily his most ambitious work to date. Well worth the wait—this album is nothing short of a revelation.

Welcome to Weird Al's ghetto, where the cats are paint guns and the weaves are real.

My first introduction to the music of "Weird Al" came at the tender age of 9 while roller-skating in my hometown of Modesto. One Saturday morning the Roller King DJ (no doubt tired of playing Wham!) threw caution to the wind and spun a tune that shook my foundations. Somewhere between the hokey pokey and the appearance of mascot Freddy

the frog, the DJ played Weird Al's song "Eat It" from his sophomore album *In 3-D* (1984). I slammed into the nearest carpeted bench (braking was never my forté) and soaked up every word. With lyrics like "You better listen/You better do what you're told/You haven't even touched/Your tuna casserole," Al's rendition of "Beat It"

transformed Michael Jackson's anthem of passive resistance into something universal and infinitely more digestible. Shortly thereafter came my first album, purchased by saving weeks worth of allowances—Weird Al's *Dare to be Stupid* (1985). Whereas most listeners gravitated toward "Yoda," Al's spin on the Kink's "Lola," my ears preferred an original song of unrequited love, "One More Minute." In a dejected voice, the song lamented, "So I pulled your name out of my rolex/And I tore all your pictures in two/And I burned down the malt shop where we used to go/Just because it reminds me of you."

Even as a 10-year-old, I found the narrator's frailty and honesty compelling. Sure, the lyrics border on the melodramatic, but hang Yankovic for that crime and you'll also have to string up Euripides, Shakespeare and Ibsen.

A deeper look into his catalog led me to his original, accordion-fueled punk ditty "Happy Birthday" (1983), which turned a child's special day into a Cold War

"Pancreas" is an original song done in the style of Brian Wilson, and features a myriad of instruments, including a French horn, toy piano, flute and ukulele. Not only is this Al's most musically accomplished work to date, but lyrically it also enters new territory. It's literally introspective—a love song to the pancreas.

"For a long time, I've wanted to do a pop song that describes the workings of an internal organ

"I kinda feel like I'm repeating myself here ... this is satire. Irony. Comedy. Even my 3-year-old daughter knows you shouldn't really stomp on weasels." -AL YANKOVIC

freakout with the warning, "The monkeys in the pentagon/Are going to cook our goose/Their finger's on the button/All they need is an excuse." My rebellious pre-teen spidey sense tingled when my mom yelled at me to lower the volume, and disappointedly added, "I never thought you'd grow up to listen to *that* type of music."

Now, you're probably thinking, c'mon, nuclear paranoia is so '80s. And you're right. So here we are, eight albums and more than 20 years later, and Weird Al has unleashed *Straight Outta Lynwood*.

Al explained to me the title is a play on N.W.A.'s classic *Straight Outta Compton*. (Note to self: Google this obscure band before turning in to editor.) "Compton is directly adjacent to Lynwood," he says. "And I really did come straight outta Lynwood! I spent the first 16 years of my life there ... I just figured it was finally time for me to represent. I want to get back to my roots and reclaim my street cred, boy-eee."

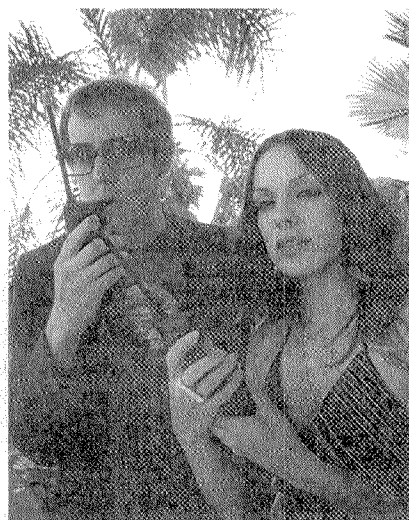
in excruciating, medically-correct detail." Al explains, "I mean *somebody* was bound to do it sooner or later—and I wasn't about to let Phil Collins get the jump on me this time."

"I'll Sue Ya," a song done in the style of Rage Against the Machine, directs that band's righteous anger towards frivolous lawsuits. One line in particular caught my attention: "I sued Delta Airlines/'Cause they sold me a ticket to New Jersey—I went there, and it sucked." When asked whether such sentiment could prompt a possible backlash, Al said, "I certainly meant no offense to the people of New Jersey, who are some of my biggest fans. I'm pretty sure they'll be able to tell it was a *joke*. Everybody knows it's *actually Alabama that sucks*."

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SIDE STAGE SPOTLIGHTING THE BEST OF LOCAL MUSIC by Evan George



THE PARALLELOGRAMS

GEOMETRY DUDES TELL us that if a quadrilateral has two pairs of opposite sides of the same lengths, then it is a parallelogram. In that case Chris Curtis and Stephanie King definitely form a parallelogram. The L.A. duo—thick-framed Curtis and sultry synth princess King—manages the difficult feat of balancing their dork factor with their chic factor, their retro pull with their future push. Opposites attract, and it shows.

But the Parallelograms are also deliciously square, and here's proof: When you stick the L.A. duo's album *Adult Contemporary* into a computer, the CD player automatically classifies its genre not as indie or Alternative, but as Easy Listening. And speaking of proofs, this

band practices their brand of electro-pop like it's accelerated math science—steady nerd-dance beats, swaths of kaleidoscope keyboards and equal parts monotone spoken word and diva disco poetry. They manage a witty update of the less-inspired electro-pop of Figurine and the keyboard rock of the Rentals that sounds more L.A. than Honolulu by giving it a spit shine of psychedelic sheen. Imagine the quintessential Tiki bar, tripped out with lava lamps and lovely ladies spilling gigantic Mai Tais on neon puke shag carpet—*Adult Contemporary* is on the list.

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