

# “Weird Al” Yankovic

**▶** THERE IS A great tradition of musical parody in the history of American culture. Stars such as Spike Jones and Stan Freberg achieved huge success through their talent for mocking the classic pop songs of the day. “Weird Al” Yankovic is today’s reigning king of pop parody, as a gifted comedian, recording artist, concert performer and video director.

Yankovic began his career in 1979 when he recorded his version of The Knack’s “My Sharona,” titled “My Bologna,” with just vocals and accordion. His next hit was “Another One Rides the Bus,” which was based on “Another One Bites the Dust” by Queen. Other early Yankovic comedy classics include “Like a Surgeon” (based on Madonna’s “Like a Virgin”) and famously “Eat It” and “Fat” (based on Michael Jackson’s “Beat It” and “Bad”).

This summer, Yankovic decided to release four new songs as singles on June 16, July 14, August 4 and August 25. These four and others will be included on his next album, slated to be released in 2010.

## What was your favorite song as child?

“Boa Constrictor” performed by Johnny Cash and written by Shel Silverstein. It’s amazingly funny for a five year old to hear about a snake eating somebody and the snake burps at the end—hilarious!

## Is it true that you did your first recordings in a bathroom?

My first nationally released record was, in fact,

recorded in a bathroom. I did “My Bologna” when I was 19-years-old, recorded in a men’s restroom across the hall from my old college radio station. I was a struggling college kid and I didn’t have a record deal, didn’t have a recording budget—so I ran some lines from the radio production room to the bathroom to get that nice warm reverb effect.

## You’ve been at this for a long time. When did you first realize that you had made it?

Well, when you called and asked to do this interview, I thought that was pretty special, a big moment for me... but the very first time? The first time I got played on the Dr. Demento radio show at 14-years-old, I felt like, “Wow, I made it.” My first record, the first Grammy, being on *The Simpsons*—there were many cool milestones.



“You also might notice the influence of Dr. Dre as well. That’s pretty much it, *Beowulf* and Dr. Dre.”

## Do you ever get any flack from the people you parody?

Rarely. The only real instance is something that has been well-documented with the whole Coolio flap around 1996, over “Amish Paradise.” That was the only time there was a problem, because I always get permission when I do things. Most artists are actually quite flattered by my parodies.

## Have you ever met Michael Jackson?

I met him on the set of one of his video shoots and backstage at one of his concerts. I actually gave him a gold record for *Even Worse*, which had the “Fat” parody. He got to add it to his collection.

## Where did you get your knack for imagery, rhyme and complex poetic rhythms?

That comes mostly from my reading of *Beowulf* in the seventh grade. This great English epic poem inspired my sensibilities and I owe almost everything artistically to that major literary work. And you also might notice the influence of Dr. Dre as well. That’s pretty much it, *Beowulf* and Dr. Dre.

## What ten words would best describe you?

Musician. Singer. Songwriter. Lyricist. Director. Producer. Warrior. Poet. Sexual surrogate.

## If you could be any woman, who would it be?

If I could be any woman at all in the whole world, I would like to be my wife Suzanne because then I would be married to such an awesome guy. People would say, “He must be funny around the house all the time! It must be so great!”

## You have a part in the upcoming film *Halloween II*.

I have a cameo in a scene where they’re taping a TV talk show and I actually play a celebrity called “Weird Al” Yankovic. It’s typecasting. They auditioned a lot of people: Kenny G, Howard Stern—but I got the job.

## If you weren’t a musician, what would you be?

I have no idea, but just taking a wild guess, I think I would probably be an arthroscopic surgeon in a small office somewhere in New Hampshire.

*“Weird Al” Yankovic was interviewed by David “Mr. Bonzai” Goggin at Westlake Recording Studios in West Hollywood. Goggin has recently released Music Smarts: The Inside Truth and Road-Tested Wisdom from the Brightest Minds in the Music Business by Berklee Press. ●*

