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DIVERSIONS

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“REALLY WE CREATE NOTHING. WE MERELY PLAGIARIZE NATURE.”

Jean Bataillon

Something WEIRD is in the air

Weird Al Yankovic tours SCSU with scissors in hand

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He has dared to be stupid. He draws his inspiration from Jamie Farr. He also makes it a point to schedule several minutes a day to stare blankly at green Jell-O.

Now, Weird Al Yankovic is daring to bring his latest tour, “Touring with Scissors,” to SCSU’s Halenbeck Hall Tuesday night. The stop at SCSU is roughly the midway point for the tour, which started July 19 in Green Bay, Wis., and will end in Vancouver, Wash., August 4.

Al’s Weird Legacy

For those who haven’t seen VH1’s Weird Al special which ran in 1999 or the ALTV special for MTV which also recently aired, there are some background facts everyone should know before attending the concert Tuesday night.

First and foremost, the king of parody pop, is not a big radish eater.

“They are not big on my list,” Yankovic said. “I don’t mind them, in moderation of course.” So anyone who had planned on wooing the man from Lynwood, Calif. (a suburb of Los Angeles) with the tasty little vegetable, should probably reconsider.

One thing Yankovic is a big fan of is parodies.

His most popular tunes include “Smells like Nirvana” and “Amish Paradise,” and recently “Pretty Fly for a Rabbi” and “The Saga Begins,” all of which are parodies of pop songs. He said most artists consider his parodies almost as a rite of passage.

“When a parody is done, it is never meant to be derogatory or to make fun of an artist of a song,” he said. “It is always meant in good humor. I think most artists look at it as a badge of honor when they get a Weird Al parody.”

Learning to Play Nice

Not all artists are pleased about their parodies. Take Al’s “Amish Paradise” which spoofed Coolio’s “Gangster’s Paradise” (which just for the record, borrowed heavily from Stevie Wonder’s 1970s hit “Lover’s Paradise”). The rapper apparently had never given his record company permission to go



Weird Al Yankovic (center) will perform his versions of popular songs with long-time bandmates (from left) Steve Jay on bass, guitar player Jim West and drummer Jon “Bermuda”

Schwartz. (Below) The tour is to promote Yankovic’s latest album is “Running With Scissors.”

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY WEIRD AL

“What better way to say I love you than a trip to the twine ball.”

Weird Al Yankovic
SINGER/SONGWRITER

ahead with the song, but Coolio’s record company allowed it just that same. Coolio was less than pleased with the results.

In the end, Yankovic sent the rapper a “very sincere letter of apology” for the misunderstanding, according to the official Weird Al Yankovic Web site. Yankovic has not heard back from Coolio since then.

This does not happen often for Yankovic. He has a policy of talking to the original artist first and getting their permission before work on the songs begins.

“As to whether I need to or not is a grey area,” he said. “I could probably get away without asking permission. It has always been a personal policy of mine to get their blessing anyway.”



Yankovic’s Inspiration

Yankovic’s parodies have covered a large spectrum of our culture, picking on everything from our love for food, to our obsession with hair to the Internet and television.

He said in the 1980s his songs seemed to deal largely with food

house mirror” reflections than anything.

“You put all this pop culture in my brain,” he said. “And spew it back out and see what happens.”

One thing that is guaranteed to happen is a lot of “research and development” for the songs. Yankovic said it is seldom that a parody pops into his head when he hears a song, it is more often a case of pouring over billboard chats and play lists to come up with ideas.

“It is rare when I’ll hear a song on the radio and think of a great idea,” he said. “It usually is a long process, but every once and awhile I will get one spontaneously.”

He also spends a great deal of time going over the videos. He said they watch the video “innumerable times” and take detailed notes regarding the video’s finer points. He added that they also keep a copy of video on set during the shooting of the videos, along with still photographs for scene replications. His videos closely mirror the originals, which, according to Yankovic is exactly how they want it to be.

“If someone is just flipping the channels,” he said. “And they say ‘Oh it’s that Nirvana video’ and all of a sudden you take them by surprise and they go ‘I didn’t know the cheerleaders had armpit hair, wait a minute that’s not right.’ That is always part of the joke for me.”

The MN Connection

Al does not only do parodies however, he also does his own work. Roughly half of the songs on his albums are originals. Some of them, such as “Hooked on Polkas” and “Polka Party” have a central Minnesota flavor to them.

One song in particular, “The Biggest Ball of Twine in Minnesota,” is very central Minnesota. Yankovic’s song immortalized the world’s largest ball of twine, which is located in Darwin, about 35 miles southwest of St. Cloud.

“I’ve been to Darwin before and made my pilgrimage,” he said. “I don’t know (if I will go back this time around).” He apparently was given a snippet of the ball of twine as a keepsake.

Yankovic, who played at the State Theatre in Minneapolis Sunday, and has Valentine’s Day off, said he does not have any plans for the romantic holiday yet, but some ideas have popped into his head.

“I have no plans right now,” he said. “But I do have a day off, Valentine’s Day I guess. What better way to say I love you than a trip to the twine ball.”

WEIRD AL YANKOVIC

The silly songster brings his own brand of pop music to central Minnesota Tuesday in SCSU’s Halenbeck Hall. Upper level tickets are still available at \$5 for students (with a limit of two per student) and \$15 for others. Tickets are available in Arwood Memorial Center and TicketMaster outlets.

and TV, he tries to stay aware of the times, and not just stick with the same ideas.

“There for a while a lot of people thought I just wrote songs about food,” Yankovic said. “Now I try to stay away from that as much as possible.”

“I try not to have too many recurring things if I can help it, just because I like to be doing something different and not repeating the same formulas over and over,” Yankovic continued. “I’m doing all I can to comment on our culture without sounding like a broken record!”

While Yankovic’s songs are reflections of his views on society, he said that it is more of a “fun-