

Vol. XXVIII, No.11 05/24/04 to 06/06/04 U.S. \$2.95 (Canada \$3.95)

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Published Every Other Thursday Since 1977™

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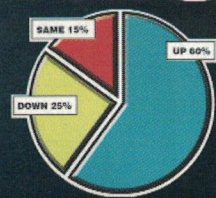
## MUSIC CONNECTION'S

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## 15 PRODUCTION & RECORDING TIPS (sidebar) p.61



# AVRIL LAVIGNE

Directing the Details  
of Her Own Career

In the two years since the release of her multiplatinum debut, 19-year-old Avril Lavigne has endured a maniacal stalker, nasty diss-es from Britney Spears fans, public cat fights, allegations that she doesn't write her own songs, and — judging by the lyrics to her new album — all the agony of young romance.



# AVRIL LAVIGNE

by Dan Kimpel

On a spring morning in cloud-shrouded Portland, OR, she is cradling a cell phone, talking about being herself. It's not the petulant princess' favorite part of being a rock star, but the mighty media machine is primed for the release of *Under My Skin*, the follow-up to the Grammy-nominated *Let Go* — and there's work to be done.

## **“What do you think — is it real different?” Lavigne asks *Music Connection*.**

*Under My Skin* should sound completely different, since this performer has jettisoned virtually the entire crew who worked with her on *Let Go* — including the Matrix, the production trio whose co-written hits “Complicated,” “Sk8R Boi” and “I’m with You” made Lavigne a star. But the new *Under My Skin* (release date: May 25) handily assimilates her former producers’ trademark use of aggressive rhythm sections, stacked backing vocals and hooky, high-octane choruses.

In interviews, the Matrix have said that their initial impression of Lavigne was that Arista Records wanted her to be a country artist. Lavigne contradicts this. “No, not at all. I think they thought I was more like Michelle Branch, more pop/folk or whatever she is. But they got me right away. I went in and played ‘Losing Grip’ and said, ‘I want to write more songs like this.’ They were more into writing singles.”

A press quote by a member of the Matrix suggesting Lavigne’s only contribution to “Complicated” was to change a couple of words and Lavigne’s gripes to the music press about the L.A.-based production team’s use of programming and pitch correction would indicate that, this time, she wanted more control of the production. Clearly, this artist doesn’t want to be perceived as a bystander on her own records.

"I have ideas," she insists. "I talk to my producers and tell them what I hear, what kind of vibe I want to go for, how I want the drums and guitars and everything. The cool thing is I trust the people I work with, so I let them do their thing. But I also give my input. I'm not trying to take away their credit, but I'd have questions about what the drums and guitars should be like."

The heavier musical reference points on *Under My Skin* indicate edgier musical influences, and Lavigne concurs. "When I was making this record I was listening to Marilyn Manson, Green Day and Blink-182."

## IN THE BEGINNING

Avril Lavigne grew up the middle child in a strict Baptist household in Napanee, Ontario, Canada (population 5,000), where her father worked for the local telephone company. Her parents didn't listen to pop music, apart from a handful of old Beach Boys, Creedence Clearwater Revival and Beatles tapes.

Lavigne graduated from church choirs to the local community theatre, taught herself guitar and sang Dixie Chicks numbers at country fairs. At 14, she entered a radio competition and, two days later, was onstage at Ottawa's Corel Centre in front of 20,000 people, singing a duet with her idol, Shania Twain.

Cliff Fabri, who would become the young artist's first manager, heard her singing new country songs to tracks at a Chapters bookstore in Ontario when she was 15. It is Fabri who is credited with introducing Lavigne to the craft of songwriting. The most significant advice he gave to his client: never sing a song you're not a co-writer of. (Fabri's name is conveniently left out of the official Avril Lavigne story, but his exhaustive journal on managing her early career can be read online at <http://groups.msn.com/avrilation/avrilsrisetofame.msnw>. (According to credible sources, the terms of an economic settlement with Lavigne forbids him to discuss their split prior to the release of *Let Go*.)

It was Cliff Fabri who sent industry insiders a videocassette of Lavigne performing onstage and in her parents' basement. A Canadian label representative forwarded the tape to New York songwriter and producer Peter Zizzo, and it whetted his appetite to collaborate with her. Lavigne made several writing trips to New York, and eventually moved to Manhattan with her brother, taking up temporary residence in a West Village apartment.

Zizzo is a well-placed songwriter; he has had cuts with Celine Dion, Jennifer Lopez and Donna Summer. At the time he met Lavigne, he and his wife — songwriter Tina Schafer, founder and producer of the New York Songwriters Circle shows — were developing Vanessa Carlton. They envisioned building Lavigne's career, particularly her writing chops, over a period of time.

But the timeline caught fire when Lavigne auditioned for Arista's boss, Antonio "LA" Reid, in Zizzo's studio. Reid signed her up for record and publishing deals. But when the early recording sessions reportedly proved disastrous, Arista sent her to L.A., where she hooked up with producer Clif Magness. Despite Lavigne's love for the heavy guitar-driven collaborations the two devised, the label disagreed with this direction. Enter the Matrix, hungry for a hit.

"She was a disgruntled little 16-year-old girl who sat down and sulked, basically," Graham Edwards from the Matrix told *MC* in a recent cover article. "I don't want to do that kind of stuff.' We were open and asked her, 'What do you want to do?' She said, 'I'm young, I want to rock.' She played us a song that was too rocky, too thrashy, like System of a Down. We couldn't imagine that — she's so gorgeous. We thought about it and we came up with the original of 'Complicated' and 'SK8R Boy,' played them, and she fell in love with them. Then we all started writing and became friends. It was the summer of fun and it's one of those albums that connected with people. Kids loved her. It all happened so fast. Three No. 1's. It changed our lives."



"She was a disgruntled little 16-year-old girl who sat down and sulked, basically, 'I don't want to do that kind of stuff.' We were open and said, 'What do you want to do?' She said, 'I'm young, I want to rock.'"

### GRAHAM EDWARDS

the Matrix, on working on Lavigne's debut album

## CANADIAN CO-WRITES

Hopefully, co-writing with Lavigne can now similarly change the life of Chantal Kreviazuk since roughly half of the songs on *Under My Skin* are collaborations with her fellow Canadian. Kreviazuk is an imaginative singer/songwriter who balances her pop influences with impressionist lyrics. Chronologically, Kreviazuk could be Lavigne's older sister, and she is no intellectual lightweight: she played a role in the Toronto stage company of *The Vagina Monologues*, and journeyed to the Middle East to investigate the well-being of the often ignored Iraqi children.

Kreviazuk's rapport with Lavigne was immediate. "We met and wrote every night for two weeks — a song a night, and no one knew," confides Lavigne. "It was awesome. We became good friends. When we were writing together, I'd have a guitar in my hands and she'd be sitting beside me at the piano. That's what it was like in the beginning."

Rather than writing from a title, the duo would complete the song, review the lyrics, and extract the title from the finished words. When *Music Connection* suggested to Lavigne that this is in reverse to the methods of many songwriters, she snaps back. "No, I don't think so. Everyone I've ever written with, we wrote the song and then said, 'What are we going to call it now?'"

Kreviazuk's husband, Raine Maida, is the frontman for the band Our Lady Peace, and he produced the tracks on *Under My Skin* that were co-written by his wife and the singer. Most of the writing took place in Toronto, at his band's rehearsal space. Lavigne



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**AVRIL LAVIGNE**

observes that it wasn’t the Ritz. “It’s this big, old warehouse with mice. I was so nervous walking in. I remember holding my key when I’d go to my car, ready to poke somebody in the eyeball.”

The two also collaborated at Kreviazuk’s isolated Malibu house. “One time I called 911. I freaked out because I thought someone was in the house. It wasn’t haunted or anything, but it’s so big and it was just me and her.” Lavigne attests that she is a night person, so the writing sessions were conducted from midnight until 5:00 a.m., with a selection of chocolate bars offering physical sustenance for the long nights of creativity.

Also present in the production credits of *Under My Skin* is Don Gilmore (known for his work with Linkin Park) and edgy musician/producer Butch Walker. In addition, Lavigne co-wrote three songs with Evan Taubenfeld, from her own band, and one, “Nobody’s Home,” with Ben Moody, recently a member of award-winning chart-toppers Evanescence.

## PICKY PICKY PICKY

Artwork, merchandise, album sequencing: Lavigne is intent on controlling multiple elements of her burgeoning career. “I’m so picky about *everything*. Right now I’m working on the album artwork. It’s like, ‘Send it back to me, make it a little darker here. Bring the border down, take the scratches off the photo.’ I’m so into that. I’m like that with merch, too.”

Lavigne says sequencing her new album was a monumental chore. “You would not believe how much time I spent on the sequence,” she reveals. “I changed it over and over and over. The first record was so easy, I just sat down [and sequenced it]. With this one, I had it mastered three different times. I spent hours. I couldn’t believe myself. I’m crazy, but I got it perfect. It ends with ‘Slipped Away.’ That’s the sad song about my grandpa passing away.”

## ‘ROUND THE WORLD

In the span between the two records, Lavigne insists she grew up. “I think I’m a pretty old 19-year old. I know a lot. I’ve been around the world and stuff. I think it’s why the lyrics are deeper and richer. I’m a different person than I was. I’m very independent now. I have good control of things. I think that comes through in the lyrics. They’re more singer/songwriter-esque; deeper, more emotional. I am an emotional person.”

## LYRICALLY SPEAKING

For this album, Lavigne estimates she wrote approximately 30 songs. "I didn't finish them," she qualifies. "I just kind of know if it's not going anywhere."

"I had a couple recorded that I thought I might give to other artists." Does she truly envision writing songs for others? "No, not at this point," she reconsiders. "I'm into writing for me and my records."

The song "Nobody's Home" uses the concept of home as metaphor, with Lavigne narrating a story in the third person.

*I couldn't tell you why she felt that way  
She felt it every day  
I couldn't help her, I just watched her make  
The same mistakes again*

"I don't really talk about it when people ask me who is in the story. It's this girl with problems and issues. She won't deal with them and she can't, because no one is really there for her. She wants to go home, to go back to the way she was, but she can't."

"Don't Tell Me" is a retort from a girl to a guy who wants her to have sex. It's a strong, assertive lyric, perfect for Lavigne's impressionable teen demographic. "I wrote it when I was 17. I wrote the lyrics about not letting a guy pressure you into doing something you don't want to do."

Another standout track, "My Happy Ending," has a circular melody and a theme of disillusionment. "It's about thinking everything was great — he was everything I wanted, and then we lost it. All's I have are the memories."

It doesn't take a psychologist to deduce that Lavigne is speaking from experience, but she won't fess up. "I'm such a fucking hopeless romantic it isn't even funny."

## MALL RATZ

Avril Lavigne has been making a 21-city tour of shopping malls, performing songs from her new album on spur-of-the-moment stops, with her fans notified by e-mail.

"There's no notice until the last moment, as far as where I'm going to be playing," she says. "The last couple of shows were 10,000 kids, so we had to move outside. We're supposed to be playing inside the mall."

And just in case critics should still think Lavigne is some manufactured product, the set is configured so that she performs seven songs solo, playing guitar, seated on a stool. "I love it. I'm doing it to show people I can play and sing. It's stripped down and intimate. When I'm playing with a band it's harder. There's so much fucking noise, and you're wearing ear monitors."

All of the songs have worked live, she says, except for the rocker from the first album, "Losing Grip," because of its hard-to-duplicate, effect-driven guitar hook.

## COOKING ON THE BUS

Lavigne won't be performing solo much longer. A tour will commence this fall, and she'll be on the road for all of 2005. She's looking forward to touring, she says, because it will give her life more structure, since she'll be doing the same thing everyday. "I'll be waking up on the bus. I want to get a routine going; do some walking, do some alone time, read, cook. If I do that, and I have a show, I'll feel better."

With the music industry relying on summer blockbusters to kick up sluggish sales, the stakes on Lavigne's record are exceedingly high. Add to that the myth of the sophomore jinx, the expectations of trying to top the sales of her first Grammy-nominated debut, plus an upcoming world tour and it adds up to a tremendous responsibility for a teenage girl.

One of Lavigne's new songs, "How Does It Feel," includes the line, "I am small and the world is big." Lavigne notes, "Sometimes I feel like I'm this little person and what I've been taking on is such a big thing."

The next line in the same song, however, is even more resounding, as Lavigne sings, "I'm not afraid of anything." She laughs loudly as the weight of this contradiction takes hold. "At that moment I was saying, 'I'm really strong, I can deal, I can take it on.'"

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