

Weird Al Wins 2019 Grammy Award

by Rita Barnea

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Photo: Annie Stoll, 'Weird Al' Yankovic and Meghan Foley pose with their award at the 61st Annual Grammys. (Photo by Emma McIntyre/Getty Images for The Recording Academy) GETTY

Who is Weird Al you might ask? Alfred Matthew Yankovic was a high school valedictorian and studied architecture in college. His college radio show earned him the nickname "Weird Al." He made a name for himself parodying popular hit music and made accompanying music videos. His first major hit was "Eat it," a parody of Michael Jackson's "Beat It." Yankovic won his first award in 1984 for "Eat It," his parody of Michael Jackson's "Beat It," in the Best Comedy Recording category. Jackson had the last laugh: the Thriller star won eight Grammys that night, a record that has yet to be beaten.

Excerpts from his bio and article by Zack O'Malley Greenburg (Forbes Staff) : Singer, musician, songwriter. Alfred Matthew Yankovic was born on October 23, 1959, in the Los Angeles suburb of Downey, California, and raised in the neighboring town of Lynwood. An only child, he first took up the accordion at age seven when a salesman came around to solicit accordion or guitar lessons for a local music school. Yankovic claimed his parents were inspired by polka star Frank Yankovic (no relation) and chose the accordion.

As a child and young teen, Al became a fan of such musician/comedians as Allan Sherman, Tom Lehrer, Spike Jones and Stan Freberg. He became especially acquainted with these musicians through the radio show of Barry Hansen, aka "Dr. Demento." After graduating as valedictorian from Lynwood High School, Al attended the California

Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo to study architecture. It was at Cal Poly that AI had a radio show and earned the nickname "Weird AI."

He was at Cal Poly where he recorded his first single, a parody of the popular "My Sharona" by The Knack, called "My Bologna." After graduating in 1980, Yankovic released "Another One Rides the Bus," a parody of Queen's smash hit, "Another one Bites The Dust." He followed up with "I Love Rocky Road," a satire of Joan Jett & the Blackhearts' "I Love Rock 'n Roll."

Yankovic's success went to a whole new level, thanks to his skilled use of music video. His first was a parody of Toni Basil's "Mickey" for his debut album, "Weird AI" Yankovic. But it was the video from his sophomore effort, "Eat It," a parody of Michael Jackson's smash "Beat It," that became a smash on MTV.

Over the years, Yankovic wrote Off the Deep End, which featured the hit "Smells Like Nirvana," a takeoff of Nirvana's landmark song "Smells Like Teen Spirit." After 1993's Alapalooza, he resurfaced in 1996 with Bad Hair Day, featuring the single "Amish Paradise," a takeoff of Coolio's smash hit "Gangsta's Paradise."

His most recent release, Straight Outta Lynwood (2006), featured the single "White & Nerdy," a suburban parody of Chamillionaire's "Ridin." During 2007 and 2008, he toured extensively to support Straight Outta Lynwood, playing dates in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. In 2011, he released his 13th album, Alpocalypse, which spoofed Lady Gaga ("Perform This Way") and Miley Cyrus ("Party in the CIA.")

"I've kind of been playing the long game--I never really wanted to be a recording artist," Yankovic joked after winning. "I just did it for 40 years so I could win a Grammy as an art director." Yankovic shared the award for Squeeze Box: The Complete Works Of "Weird AI" Yankovic with Meghan Foley and Annie Stoll, who joined him on the project as art directors--and backstage at the Grammys during the pre-telecast portion of the ceremony.

Since his first-aired comedy song in 1976, he has sold more than 12 million albums (as of 2007), recorded more than 150 parody and original songs, and performed more than 1,000 live shows. His works have earned him five Grammy Awards and a further eleven nominations, four gold records, and six platinum records in the United States. Yankovic's first top ten Billboard album (Straight Outta Lynwood) and single ("White & Nerdy") were both released in 2006, nearly three decades into his career.

His latest album, Mandatory Fun (2014), became his first number-one album during its debut week.