



# AVRIL LAVIGNE'S WILD SIDE

The last five years have been a high-speed trip to the top for wild-child singer-songwriter Avril Lavigne. Signed to Arista Records at age 16, she captivated the pop world with her attitude-filled songwriting, gung-ho guitar playing, and confrontational vocals. In contrast to her squeaky-clean teen-pop peers, Avril projected a gritty, tough, don't-mess-with-me vibe with chart-topping hits like "Complicated" and "Sk8er Boi."

Lavigne's first single, "Complicated," hit the airwaves like a slap in the face, startling listeners with its jagged newness and securing her place on the musical map. The song's relentless catchiness and innovative production style combined with Avril's fresh, direct vocals for a one-two punch that instantly scaled the charts.

It was the start of something big: To date, Avril's first two albums—2002's *Let Go* and 2004's *Under My Skin*—have sold more than 24 million copies combined. She's won multiple World Music Awards, MTV Video Music Awards, and Juno Awards, and she's been nominated for eight Grammys.

Now 21, the Canadian-born singer-songwriter is back in the studio. "I'm working on my third album," she confides. "I'm really happy with how it's coming along so far, and I'm excited for people to hear it—but that's all I want to say about it for now."

Whether or not she's willing to divulge details, the still-unnamed release, due out later this year, will no doubt make the most of Avril's signature tough-but-vulnerable point of view and capitalize on the hook-heavy choruses her fans have come to expect. But for Lavigne, the songwriting process is far from calculated. "Whatever comes out comes out!" she exclaims. "I don't really plan it. It just happens very naturally—it's very authentic."



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It also helps that Avril habitually collaborates with some of the best writers and producers in the business. On *Let Go*, songwriting/production power-team the Matrix—Scott Spock, Lauren Christy, and Graham Edwards—co-wrote five tracks, including the radio smashes “Complicated” and “Sk8er Boi.” Other cuts were co-written by producer Clif Magness, whose credits also include projects with Celine Dion, Kelly Clarkson, and Sheena Easton. Under *My Skin* featured collaborations with singer-songwriter Chantal Kreviazuk and her husband Raine Maida, frontman of the band Our Lady Peace, among others. “I enjoy working with talented people,” Avril explains. “More than anything, there has to be a good vibe between us, and a comfort level.”

Most fans envision Avril holding a guitar—but she’s a pianist as well, and equally comfortable writing songs on either instrument. “I use both!” she says. “Sometimes I’ll start on the guitar and then move to the piano to get new inspiration. I took piano lessons for a few years when I was younger, but I didn’t have any guitar teachers. I started playing it when I was around seven years old. My dad had a guitar, and I was curious, and picked it up. Plus, I loved to sing. I think the first songs I learned were ‘Fly Away’ by Lenny Kravitz and Bob Dylan’s ‘Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door.’”

For an artist who’s known for the stunning production of her albums, Avril is surprisingly comfortable with intimate and minimal performances, featuring just voice and acoustic guitar. “I love stripping down a song,” she says. “That way, you get to showcase both the song and the vocal performance.”

Lavigne plays both electric and acoustic guitar in her shows, including Yamaha’s APX9C acoustic electric steel-string guitar, an innovative model that features a two-way piezo/condenser mic preamp for a full, round sound. “It’s a really consistent guitar!” enthuses Avril. “I enjoy playing it, and I think it

looks good—it’s black and small.” Lavigne also has a second APX9C in a natural satin finish.

Avril usually tours with a Yamaha MPC7 MIDIPiano, a classic 7’6” acoustic grand with built-in digital piano sounds, direct audio out, and other high-tech features. When circumstances don’t permit her to use the large, MIDI-enhanced grand piano, Yamaha’s P250 professional stage piano is a capable stand-in. “Sometimes I put the keyboard in a piano shell when I’m touring,” Lavigne explains, “as it can be difficult traveling with a real piano, especially overseas—getting piano tuners in each of these foreign countries is a challenge.” In addition to the P250, she and her band also use a Yamaha P60 digital piano and the rackmount version of the Motif synthesizer.

She is also the proud owner of a Yamaha MPC2 PE 5’8” Grand MIDIPiano. “It’s at home, in my music room,” Avril says. “I love having it in the house. People come over and enjoy playing it, and it’s really nice as a writing tool.”

Lavigne career is blazing forward at full speed. In addition to releasing her new album in 2006, she’ll be making her big-screen debut in not one, but three movies: *Fast Food Nation*, *The Flock*, and as a voice actor in animated raccoon comedy *Over the Hedge*. She’s branching out in other arenas as well. She recently signed as a model with top agency Ford Models, became the new “face” for Chanel, and was featured—wearing several unabashedly glamorous outfits—in a photo spread in the February 2006 issue of *Harper’s Bazaar*.

The rapid progression from scruffy sk8er girl to glossy fashionista might seem like a dizzying leap to some—but Avril is used to shaking things up wherever she goes. From the start of her career, she says, “I think I’ve done a good job. I didn’t think too hard about what I was doing, and it has all been very natural. I’ve really followed my heart.”





# WORKING WITH AVRIL & HER GUITARS:

Vancouver-based guitar tech Brian Gibney has worked with such artists as Sum 41 and Beck. But he's spent the past two years touring with Avril Lavigne and her band. He's the man who keeps all Avril's guitars—as well as those of co-guitarists Devon Branson and Evan Taubenfeld—in top playing condition.

“Avril has a tough gig,” notes Gibney. “She has to play and sing and entertain the crowd all at the same time. But she has the talent. Playing just seems to come naturally to her, without a whole lot of effort. Avril can pretty much pick up any instrument and just start playing. And of course, she's an incredible singer.”

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In concert Lavigne alternates between piano, electric guitar, and acoustic guitar. According to Gibney, the right acoustic sound was elusive—until Avril started playing a pair of Yamaha APX9Cs. “The guitar she was using before had no controls at all,” says Gibney, “just a piezo pickup. The problem with a piezo-only system is that the tone can be thin and percussive. In a stadium, it can almost sound like a tambourine or a hi-hat. All you hear is attack.”

But the APX9C combines a piezo pickup with a condenser microphone mounted on a gooseneck inside the body. “The mic adds body warmth,” explains Brian. “It makes the piezo sound seem less clacky. But even with that microphone inside the body, we don't have any problem with things like belt-buckle noises. And since we use a soundhole cover, there are no feedback problems either.”

In addition to her regular concerts, Avril plays many impromptu acoustic sessions at radio stations. “They're usually on the afternoons of show days,” says Gibney. “It's a tough schedule—sometimes Avril literally has to run into the concert and onto the stage! But the Yamahas are excellent for those acoustic situations, especially since most radio stations have pretty minimal setups for playing live. We can adjust the sound from the guitar itself, so that Avril still gets the tone she wants. We also pop out the soundhole cover to get even more warmth from the guitar. Everyone always tells us how great it sounds.”

The Lavigne gig isn't Gibney's first experience with Yamaha guitars. “Every Yamaha I've ever picked up just feels right in your hands,” he says. “They always have great playability and excellent fingerboards. Their consistency is excellent too. I've never encountered any of the warpage problems I've had with other acoustic guitars, even though we fly Avril's guitars all over the place. I'd recommend Yamaha guitars to anyone.”

“The best thing about Avril,” says Brian, “is that she's into music for the sake of the music—not the pictures. She plays a lot offstage—there's always a guitar and a piano in her dressing room. On top of that, she's a treat to work with. Some teenagers think they know everything, even when they haven't been in the spotlight like Avril has. But she's not like that at all. She's wonderful to everyone. She's always considerate. She's just 'good people.'”

*Avril was photographed at LAX Hollywood.*