

The **Diceman** Cometh



TO PARAPHRASE LL COOL J, don't call it "a comeback" when you mention the current resurrection of Andrew Dice Clay's career. Clay's storied course—the iconic creation of actor/comedian Andrew Silverstein, a blend of Lenny Bruce and Elvis Presley at maximum volume—was an upward trajectory of latter 80s/early 90s stadium gigs, HBO specials, and platinum recordings filled with rude nursery rhymes and naughtily cunning linguistics punctuated by his haltering Brooklynese delivery. Dice came, cursed and conquered.

Until he didn't.

He was lambasted by religious groups (as well as women and LGBTQ organizations) on the cusp of the politically correct movement. Unsuccessfully trying to tame his brusque persona with several low rated sit-coms in the mid-90s, the Dice Man laid low, tending to family, and taking smaller standup gigs.

Until he didn't.

Appearances as an explosive version of himself on *Entourage* (2011) and a stunningly dramatic turn in Woody Allen's *Blue Jasmine* (2013) turned his fortunes to gold again, with an autobiography, the just-released *The Filthy Truth* with David Ritz, acting as the cherry on top. Dice appears November 13, 7 p.m. at Towne Book Center & Café, 220 Plaza Drive, Suite B-3, Collegeville, PA.

When your PR gentleman said you were in Australia, I thought maybe it was for a vacation, but casual reading reveals you've caused trouble Down Under telling news programs that you want to 'kangaroo fuck' half the chicks across Australia. Are you heartened to see that you have the same effect throughout the civilized world that you've had in America?

The kangaroo fucking was all a big mistake. My publicist lead to me to believe this was a cable morning show and language wouldn't be a problem. I was just having some fun. I was shocked when it made front page throughout the whole country. But all is good Down Under, I apologized and the audiences have been fantastic.

At 57, why tell all now? Much of who you are at your best is only finally happening now?

I had the idea of doing the book years ago, but put it aside as I didn't think the timing was right. But after *Entourage*, a book came up again. That timing made sense. Plus, David Ritz certainly knows what he's doing what with over 40 books from Ray Charles to Don Rickles. And I liked the fact he knows the rock and roll lifestyle; he just did Joe Perry's autobiography.

Within Filthy Truth, you talk about the jump between selling out Madison Square Garden and other arenas before 'the fall' and working tiny clubs. Other than the money, was there anything wrong about small rooms? Or is your comedy just not meant for the intimate environment?

I always wanted to take stand-up to rock star heights and playing places like the Garden was the only way to do that. But I do like playing small places where I can easily fuck with people in the front row. I even wanted to shoot my special at the Roxy on the Sunset Strip so it would have a raw feel, but Showtime wanted it in a theater. And what happens next, Sarah Silverman shoots a special in a place the size of a closet.

It seems to have occurred to you that during hard downtime, fashion always turns backward, and that everything would eventually be OK. But you seem to worry, too, as detailed in the book. Do you wish that you always

Holiday could get inside a song because the song was inside her. Jelly Roll was a most unfortunate gentleman; he's also one of my favorite musicians. And Blind Blake is definitely one of my guitar heroes. He had an advantage over people: his nails. My nails will snap. Blake couldn't possibly break his nails because he had claws. It must have been his diet.

Do you consider yourself a curator of time-lost songs?

Oh, I don't know about that. Maybe it's my appreciation for the past; it depends on where the past was. I do believe very strongly in putting across an honest sentiment. Sentimentality is practically non-existent; it's pretty much evaporated. I swear that 99.9 percent of the population is looking for noise, not music. They're addicted to maximum volume and then some: the louder, the better.

That's a real puzzle, a mind-boggling phenomenon. But, then, what isn't? If someone who likes having their eardrums blown out by lunatics hears a person like me, playing some ditty or dirge on an acoustic guitar, they'll probably think: What the hell is this? It's not music. And then they may start throwing things.

What would you do if you weren't playing music?

If the opportunity arose, let's see. I could do caricatures. Or I could be a voice-over whistler. It could work out; it could also be a pain in the neck.

So, Leon, tell me: What was the deal with you and that onstage tomato?

Sometimes tomatoes are the best accompanists. ■

We discussed the virtue of education, advice and training, and he referred to his current duet partner, one whose acquaintance he made at a benefit in Manhattan for that city's poor and disenfranchised. "You can hear that with Gaga. Remember, she's jazz trained as a vocalist and as a pianist. She's got chops." Bennett recalled seeing her on stage, and knowing immediately how "tremendous an improvising singer" she was, "such taste, such quality, such tone." They met backstage that night, and Bennett, ever the sharpie, relied upon his intuition, and said that the pair should make an album together. "And she said 'Let's do it!' She wanted it as much as I did, and made it happen." While most of the song selections were Bennett's, he said that it was Gaga's response to those songs that led them to *Cheek to Cheek's* catalog of cool. "The minute she heard 'Lush Life,' a very tough song to sing, she went wild. She cried every time she sang it. That song reminded her of her own life in her mind, and you can hear it. I watched her in the studio, tears rolling down her cheek. And when she was done, I had to do Duke Ellington's song, 'Sophisticated Lady' with just me and the piano in response. It was only fair and fitting." Heck, Bennett loves Gaga so much, he doesn't even mind some of her most garish outfits. "She's very glamorous. No, her costumes don't bother me. I love the way she dresses. She's beautiful." ■

November 28, 8 pm: Tony Bennett with Antonia Bennett. Borgata Event Center, 1 Borgata Way, Atlantic City, NJ. \$146, 126, 86, 70. Tickets 866-900-4TIX (4849), www.TheBorgata.com.

played by that belief? Other than teaching your children the value of patience and hard work, you seem to have sabotaged yourself on occasion.

I don't what you mean by sabotage, I play by my open rules and guess what, I'm back on top again.

You also mention that under pressure from the Parents Music Resource Center, the National Organization for Women, and several gay outfits, you pulled back from your own career to let the smoke clear. Two things: do you think now that retreat might have been the wrong move? And do you think many rights organizations used you as a whipping boy for publicity, to find a face for their cause?

There's no question these groups made me a target. You know why? Because I was playing to 60,000 people a week-end and I scared the shit out of them. There were plenty of comics doing dirty shit on stage, but nobody bothered them because they were playing to 100 people a night in comedy clubs. All these groups were becoming a pain in the ass and made doing these shows not as a fun as they once were.

The move from doing Pips Comedy Club at the start to the Rodney Dangerfield HBO special Nothing Goes Right in 1988—people forget that you weren't an overnight sensation, that you boned this. I know you tried to tame the 'Andrew Dice Clay' character for series television eventually. How many personae do you think you went through, concepts played with?

I don't like to think "my character" or "my personae." Would you ask that same question to Slash, Axl and Keith Richards. I'm from Brooklyn, so that could explain some of what you see on stage. As for the TV shows, they were projects I was forced to do. So next question.

I don't want to turn it into Richard Attenborough's cornball Chaplin bit where he found his bowler and his tramp cane, but when the curatorial process commenced on the 'Andrew Dice Clay' character, did you have all of 'his' elements in your mind at once or did it come in piecemeal fashion? Did you build it up?

You're funny with these questions. I will say having the right leather helped. In the beginning I was doing a Jerry Lewis nutty professor character and then I would into John Travolta with leather jacket. That's the short answer. For the long answer, buy my book.

Was making it big a huge 'fuck you' to people you were raised with who might have doubted your abilities, or is success its own reward? Same goes for the renewed success you're having now.

I only needed to prove things to myself. I don't care what other people think.

Was it hard bringing up the passages about your parents. They seemed to really 'get' who you were as a man and as a performer, like your mom knowing that you could do dramatic roles.

My parents were the best—they believed in me from the beginning. No matter who represented me in my career, they had to talk to my father first. So writing about them was not easy 'cause I miss them.

Doug Ellin (Entourage creator) seems to believe in you as much as your parents, and that you have so much faith in yourself. Does that come from your parents? How much is survival, and how much simply comes from the fact that you say you are not a depressed comic like so many in the biz?

Again with the psychobabble shit. I've never been a depressed person, just someone who was driven to be the

biggest comic in the world.

Is it surprising that many comics you've known are so clinically down on themselves?

Next question.

From the sound of the book, you really did study rock and big band music before studying comedy or comedians, as part of your art. Why?

Comedians always bored the shit out of me. They would stand on stage with their stupid tie and tell airplane jokes and I'd have to walk after five minutes. But watch Buddy Rich, Elvis, Hendrix, Led Zeppelin—even Muhammad Ali. Now you're talking exciting performers.

At the time of the Woody Allen casting, you said how you'd understand if Scorsese called you would get the gangster casting, but that Allen was an entirely different ball of wax. How does it NOW feel to have Scorsese calling you in for his HBO punk rock project with Jagger—you're playing a coke head radio exec—right? And did Allen let you do your own thing, based on the subtlety of the character as written or did you make your character in Blue Jasmine that subtle?

Woody is an amazing director, he lets you bring your ideas to the script and if they work that's great. And he being a stand-up comedian, I think we had a little extra connection in working together. And when *Blue Jasmine* came out, I did have a feeling that other producers and directors would be calling. So when Scorsese called, that was unbelievable—the guy that did *Casino*, *Goodfellas*. I don't want to say anything about my character or the plot, but you're gonna love it.

Was acting, the genuine sort that you do in Blue Jasmine, an aim from the start of your stand-up career?

My original plan was to be actor. Doing characters in my stand-up was my way of getting the attention of casting directors. I created "Dice" and the rest is history.

You're surprisingly gentle, open and friendly while discussing relationships with Howard Stern, Sam Kinison, Mickey Rourke, Sylvester Stallone, Axl Rose. Was it all as good as you make it sound, or are you protecting the guilty?

Hanging with those guys back in the day was a lot of fun. Was it all good?...for the most part. If it was bad, it's none of your fucking business. I'm just kidding.

What do you think of opening comedy to the big rooms—and with that, other comics such as Dane Cook and Aziz Ansari who have followed in that wake?

I do get a kick out of it that comics today feel they haven't arrived until they've played the Garden. That's great that Dane and Aziz can sell out the Garden, but come to me when they can sell out over 300 arenas. Let's not forget playing the Rosebowl with Guns N' Roses and Metallica.

Why is Philadelphia a second home to you? I know we've always loved you here, and supported you even when you weren't doing the stadiums.

My ex-fiancé, Eleanor Kerrigan, who's probably one of the best comedians working today, is from there. So I always had "family there." Playing the Spectrum was amazing and I shot my *Diceman Cometh* special there. The people are real people—like Brooklyn people.

Can you see yourself doing this all again—the autobiographical process? You're quite good at it.

Would I write another book? I don't know think so. This took a lot out of me. But don't be surprised if someone makes a movie out of this one. ■