

The Work Group Lays Foundation For Andrew Dorff's Debut Set

BY CARRIE BORZILLO

LOS ANGELES—Ask most musicians what their earliest musical experience is, and you usually get a detailed answer. However, ask Andrew Dorff, the 20-year-old son of film/TV composer Steve Dorff and brother of actor Stephen Dorff, and the reply is, "I never listened to music."

That is probably why his debut album, "Hint Of Mess," due Aug. 12 on the Work Group, doesn't have the derivative sound one might expect from an unseasoned youth.

Dorff's gravelly voice, combined with his quirky lyrics and odd lyrical phrasing, makes the otherwise pop-sounding "Hint Of Mess" stand apart from what's on the radio today.

The one comparison that could be made would be Dorff's voice to the raspy sounds of Tom Waits. "Everyone says I must be influenced by Tom Waits or Elvis Costello or Lou Reed, but I don't know them," says Dorff, who wrote and recorded the album last year in Memphis and Oxford, Miss., with producer Dennis Herring (Dorff and Chris Fogel co-produced).

"My influences are you and him and her and just music in general," he continues. As inconceivable as it seems, Dorff grew up unaware of the music going on around him. "I don't really listen to much music. I grew up around it, but I always tried to avoid it. When I was young, I'd pretty much stay secluded in my room or I'd go to my dad's stu-

dio if I didn't have a baby-sitter. I didn't have a stereo until I was 14 or 15. My dad would put on the radio and I'd just scream, 'Turn that off!' I was real embarrassed recently when I said to someone, 'Who's this?' and everyone laughed. It was the Beatles."

Even once Dorff finally became more interested in music, his first experiences aren't what one would expect after hearing the decidedly left-of-center "Hint Of Mess." His first songwriting credit was on a song called "Desperate Times" for "Murder, She Wrote," one of the many TV programs his father has written music for. (The elder Dorff is a two-time Grammy nominee, as well as winner of Country Music Assn., People's Choice, and Juno Awards. He has written for several movies and TV shows, such as "Murphy Brown," and written songs for Kenny Rogers and Anne Murray.)

The first two albums Dorff bought might also come as a surprise: Michael Bolton's "Soul Provider" and Don Henley's "The End Of The Innocence."

Even today, the artist says he listens mostly to classical music or pop/R&B artists, such as R. Kelly and Babyface.

The one common denominator is a pop sensibility. "I guess growing up the way I did, I think the structure of a

song subconsciously got stuck in my head by my father," he says. "So, I started writing pop songs around age 13 or 14."

By the time high school rolled around, Dorff says, he became completely distracted by music, leading him to complete his schooling in a home study program. At age 16, he took a brief course on record production in the University of California, Los Angeles' Extension program. However, it wasn't until age 18, while living in New York, that he began to sing and perform in public. He soon became a regular at the Bitter End before heading back to his hometown of Los Angeles.

"I never thought I would sing," says Dorff. "I was too shy. But one day, a cheesy melody hit my head, and I wanted to sing it. And I wrote this song 'Baby Doll' for my girlfriend [actress Claire Danes] at the time for Valentine's Day."

"Most of my life was spent watching," he continues, "but then it just happened, and when it did, it was really quick and it just spilt out of me all at once. I feel I have stories to tell, and this record really reflects a lot about me. There's a sensitive side, a quirky, funny side, and an angry, darker side."

Soon after school, Dorff hooked up with music publishing consultant Linda Blum. She began shopping his demo tape to labels and eventually hooked him up with the Work Group. She also introduced him to a few of the musicians and writers he collaborated with on "Hint Of Mess."

While Dorff wrote the majority of the lyrics on the album, he collaborated on the music for each song. Among his co-writers are his mentor, New York-based singer/songwriter Willie Nile; Justin Clayton; Jamie Houston; Michael Ochs; and his father, who co-wrote and arranged and conducted the string quartet on "Come To Me."

But, it was Dorff's performances at the Work Group and Direct Management that landed him with both companies. "The amazing thing was that he really performed," says Direct Management's Martin Kirkup, who manages Dorff with his partner Steven Jensen. "His veins in his neck popped out, he prowled around the office. It was a full-on emotional intensity, and in the end, we were like, 'How can we not sign him?'"

Jordan Harris, co-president of the Work Group with Jeff Ayeroff, had a similar first encounter with Dorff. "He has some brilliant lyrics, and his stories and characters are wonderful," says Harris. "Then he performed for us in the office, and he was just amazing to watch."

That said, live performances will be a key factor in spreading the word on Dorff. He left for a six-week promotional tour of Europe June 21, and he'll open for World Party in the U.S. July 16-28.

He then heads back to Europe for a few summer festivals: Belgium's Pukkelpop Festival Aug. 22, Britain's Reading Festival Aug. 24, and the Netherlands' Crossing Border Festival Sept. 13.

"We're really stressing touring, set up through word-of-mouth, and international markets for this," says Harris.

On the international front, "Hint Of Mess" has already sparked interest from Sony's affiliate in France. Therefore, Dorff opened for Steve Winwood

there June 24.

The label doesn't plan to service radio right away. Instead, it plans to send out loads of promotional copies of the first track from the album, "Supercool," to initiate word-of-mouth. If a recent run-in with Glen Ballard, the producer who collaborated on Alanis Morissette's "Jagged Little Pill," is any indication, the word-of-mouth has already begun.

"I ran into Glen," says Harris, "and, he came up to me and started singing 'Supercool.' The people that seem to fall in love with [Dorff] first have come from the creative community."

Part of the appeal of "Supercool," which will eventually be serviced to modern rock and triple-A radio, is its lyrics. Offbeat lines like "Scorches like freezer burn" and "Yeah, it hurts real neat" nicely offset the song's pop structure.

"If you strip my voice and lyrics off these songs, they are pop songs," says Dorff. "But lyrically, and [with] my voice, there's a twist. But I don't con-

sider it alternative. I don't consider it pop/rock. I don't know."

Phil Cassens, the A&R executive at the Work Group who signed Dorff, says he's glad that "Hint Of Mess" doesn't fit nicely into any one format.

When you sift through as many tapes as we do, you find thousands that are trying to be Bush or [No Doubt singer] Gwen Stefani," he says. "[Dorff's] voice has a unique flavor. It forces you to really concentrate on it."

The Work Group has a good track record with fitting square pegs into round holes, such as Fiona Apple, who, like Dorff, has an older-sounding voice and frighteningly mature songs, yet was just in her teens when she wrote her debut album, "Tidal." We're specializing in very young artists with very mature voices and content of their songs," quips Harris. "As a company, we sign a lot of square pegs that later the market comes around to. Fiona Apple, Jamiroquai are not easy, and Andrew isn't either. We have to be patient."



DORFF

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ARTIST(S)	Venue	Date(s)	Gross Ticket Price(s)	Attendance Capacity	Promoter
U2 FUN LOVIN' CRIMINALS	Commonwealth Stadium Edmonton, Alberta	June 14-15	\$3,493,456 (\$4,823,415 Canadian) \$40.09/\$29.22	90,000 two sellouts	TNA International Ltd. Universal Concerts Canada
U2 RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE	Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Los Angeles	June 21	\$3,329,775 \$52.50/\$37.50	65,488 sellout	TNA International Ltd.
U2 OASIS	Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum Oakland, Calif.	June 18-19	\$3,263,243 \$52.50/\$37.50	66,990 85,000, two shows	TNA International Ltd. Bill Graham Presents
U2 FUN LOVIN' CRIMINALS	Winnipeg Stadium Winnipeg, Manitoba	June 12	\$1,653,884 Gross Record (\$2,283,518 Canadian) \$40.02/\$29.15	42,270 sellout	TNA International Ltd. Universal Concerts Canada
JIMMY BUFFETT & THE CORAL REEFER BAND	World Music Theatre Tinley Park, Ill.	June 20-21	\$1,557,576 \$46/\$30.25/\$23.50	54,555 two sellouts	Tinley Park Jam Corp. Nederlandler Organization
JIMMY BUFFETT & THE CORAL REEFER BAND	Deer Creek Music Center Noblesville, Ind.	June 25, 27	\$1,229,623 \$46/\$23.50	40,475 two sellouts	Sunshine Promotions
JIMMY BUFFETT & THE CORAL REEFER BAND	Hardee's Walnut Creek Amphitheatre Raleigh, N.C.	June 16-17	\$1,081,739 \$36.50/\$23.75/\$19.50	39,846 two sellouts	PACE Concerts Cellar Door
JIMMY BUFFETT & THE CORAL REEFER BAND	Alpine Valley Music Theatre East Troy, Wis.	June 28	\$925,205 \$51/\$33.50/\$23.50	35,112 sellout	Tinley Park Jam Corp. Nederlandler Organization
OZZFEST '97: OZZY OSBOURNE, BLACK SABBATH, MARILYN MANSON, PANTERA, TYPE O NEGATIVE	Alpine Valley Music Theatre East Troy, Wis.	June 21	\$774,345 \$45/\$40/\$25/\$20	31,930 sellout	Tinley Park Jam Corp. Nederlandler Organization
DAVE MATTHEWS BAND LOS LOBOS	World Music Theatre Tinley Park, Ill.	June 27	\$612,740 \$25/\$19.50	28,364 sellout	Tinley Park Jam Corp. Nederlandler Organization

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