

THE K! INTERVIEW

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of idol worship.”***

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**CRAZY
AS I AM”**

**ANDY BIERSACK
ANDY BLACK, BLACK VEIL BRIDES**

WORDS: JAMES MACKINNON PHOTO: PAUL HARRIES

Andrew Dennis Biersack is a man of many guises. As the frontman of Hollywood rockers Black Veil Brides, he has armoured himself in varying degrees of make-up and tattered leather over the last 10 years to lead his band, and their enduring fan base, through allegorical tales of hope and resistance against dark forces.

On 2016 solo album *The Shadow Side* he unveiled Andy Black, a debonair vehicle for exploring darkened disco sounds and his personal relationships with love, anxiety and, most recently, his hometown of Cincinnati on second album *The Ghost Of Ohio*. In 2017 he appeared on cinema screens in the shlock rock thriller *American Satan* portraying rock star Johnny Faust, a role which he reprises in the upcoming spin-off series, *Paradise City*.

When we meet Andy in a function room of Shepherd's Bush's Dorsett Hotel, he is

fresh from our photo shoot and dressed in a casual denim jacket and a white T-shirt with 'Cincinnati' emblazoned across the front. A tiger's head ring indicates his affinity with the town's football team, the Bengals. As K!'s snapper packs up their equipment, Andy relates their shared realisation that it has been a decade since his picture first appeared in this magazine. At 28 years old, he has achieved a lot since dropping out of high school in his late-teens to pursue life as a musician in Los Angeles. His list of credits now extends over seven albums and includes acting, presenting an online chat show, writing a comic book that accompanies *The Ghost Of Ohio* and a yet-to-be-released memoir of sorts. Through a tireless work ethic and self-belief he has arguably changed the course of his life in ways few else manage.

Growing up in the spotlight, though, has brought Andy intense pressure and scrutiny. In the early years when Black Veil Brides



Andy had forgotten his house keys for the third time this month



THE MAN IN BLACK

The facts behind the
masks of **ANDY
BIERSACK...**

BORN: December 26,
1990 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

LIVES: Los Angeles,
California.

EDUCATION: Cincinnati
School for Creative and
Performing Arts, Ohio
(did not graduate).

BANDS: Black Veil Brides,
Andy Black.

SPECIAL SKILLS:

A larger-than-life
imagination coupled
with a fearless work
ethic to turn his creative
aspirations into reality.

MOST LIKELY TO SAY:

"What would Batman do?"

LEAST LIKELY TO SAY:

"No, I don't think I can
do that."

HE'S A LEGEND

BECAUSE: From his solo
records and leading Black
Veil Brides, through to
comic books and more,
he has spun narratives
of resistance and
redemption that legions of
fans have applied to their
own lives. And he's only
just getting started.

The mic's that
way, Andy...

were both touted by fans and reviled by detractors as “the most hated band in rock”, and Andy was numbing his anxiety and OCD with alcohol, the line between his onstage persona and his personal life was blurry and, at some points, nonexistent. As he explains over the course of our conversation with lucid precision despite jet lag, it is a balance he has worked hard to redress in recent years.

“It’s been interesting to be able to see myself change and grow from the time I was a teenager online and in magazines,” he says, “the weird periods, the good periods, and whatever else in between...”

Growing up in the public eye, do you feel that any past decisions you made will always be open to criticism?

“Oh yeah, but I guess I just embrace that kind of stuff. The good thing is, because I was fortunate enough to have any kind of success at that age I was paying attention to my career. I can look back and go, ‘I don’t see how that was going to be beneficial at all...’ but in my mind at the time I was thinking, ‘Oh, this is a cool look for the band that ties into this thing.’ So most of the quote-unquote embarrassing things that existed were tangentially involved with the band in some capacity, so they’re not so much embarrassing, more just a different era or different costume. It’s the George Clooney Batman with the nipples as opposed to the Christian Bale Batman, y’know what I mean? It’s whatever flavour of the character you want to see.”

Which is your favourite Batman?

“I was only a year old when Batman Returns came out, but I was obsessed with it when I was little because it was gritty. They recut the whole thing and released a kid-friendly version, but my dad had the adult VHS version where Batman kills a guy and Penguin eats a dude’s nose. My mom wouldn’t let me watch it, so that probably sparked my interest in that character, to tell you the truth, because that was the unknown thing.”

How much did that character inform your idea of leading a group?

“I mean, I could go on and on about that character and how it effects me in different capacities, but it was most certainly a motivating thing. The truth is the Black Veil Brides version of me, in the early days, was me trying to create my own version of that character. I’m a kid with social anxiety that has been diagnosed with everything – learning disabilities, ADHD, OCD – but I wanna be a rock star, so what do I do? I’m gonna make this Andy Sixx version of myself who isn’t afraid to talk to people. So it was hugely inspiring. And then ultimately that swung in the other direction where I’m just yelling and starting fights with people who flip me off. So the story of that character reached a zenith with me doing nothing but making big declarative statements about how great I am and picking fights.”

Did you feel that you needed to be larger-than-life in that capacity?

“Yeah. I wasn’t socialised properly because I dropped out of high school and I didn’t have a lot of friends, and then suddenly I’m on tour

and people wanna talk to me. Everyone around me was significantly older than me and had life experience I didn’t have, so I was just building my personality from different things and making this amalgam character that had the most swagger possible. But I think at that age almost all of us are trying to figure out what we are, I just had people paying attention.”

The Ghost Of Ohio is a provocative title. How much did your hometown shape the man you are today?

“There was a period in my life where I didn’t want to talk about being from Cincinnati or Ohio because I felt so much anger towards it. I can say it now, but I could never admit back then that all I wanted was to be acknowledged

Andy Biersack: the meanest side-eye in rock



by my hometown. I’m from this small working-class town just outside of Cincinnati on the west side. We don’t have celebrities, most people live and die within five miles of where they were born – that’s the whole thing. And here I was touring the world in a successful rock band, on the cover of magazines, and there was never so much as a, ‘Hey, this guy’s from here.’ You have to understand that it wasn’t just that I wasn’t acknowledged: we were actively disliked. People would come to the shows when Black Veil would play in town and throw shit at us, and make fun of the band even though I was from there. There was no sense of any kind of pride, it was just, ‘Fuck that guy, he’s a poser.’ In Hollywood people are coming out and adopting us, and I don’t even fucking care about Los Angeles. I live there, but my heart has never been there. So when I was 20 that made me really mad.”

Why do you think that got under your skin?

“My whole life had been so centred on the idea of retribution and revenge, on all the people who made fun of me or hurt me, that they would see. It was a) exhausting and b) illogical because there isn’t a moment like in the movies where you come home and there’s a ticker tape parade and everybody apologises for being mean. People have their own shit going on and they get on with their own life. It’s very easy when you have any form of success to imagine a world where you are the most important character because in your life you are constantly treated that way.”

So what was it that changed?

“In 2014 we had a little bit of time off and I was going through a tough time in my life. I was drinking heavily and my grandmother was diagnosed with cancer. One of the biggest regrets I have is I was touring so extensively that I didn’t get to see my grandfather before he died, and we were really close so it was upsetting. So when we had time off the road just as my grandmother was going into her chemo treatments I went back home to take care of her. It was the first substantial amount of time I had spent there in a while, because I had only been seeing the anger. And maybe it’s because I was a bit older, but running errands for her and walking around the same six places, seeing the same people that I went to school with every day, that need to be acknowledged started to melt away. It didn’t matter, because this was what mattered: being with my family during a potential crisis. Thankfully, about a year later she went into remission and since then I started making a point of going home more often.”

Where would you say you feel most at home now?

“In my house with my wife and my cats and my dogs. I love going to my parents’ house, but my life has changed to the degree where I have a little family and things that separate me from just being a pirate on the road. We shot a vast majority of the music video for The Ghost Of Ohio in my

grandmother’s house and that will always be home to me, too. It’s weird how you can be pulled in both ways.”

How have your memories of these periods changed since you got sober?

“In the movies where someone gets sober everything feels better, and I did have that for maybe six months. And then out of nowhere the sledgehammer of emotions came where all the stuff that I wasn’t processing and had been trying to drink through – whether it’s my anxieties or OCD or whatever else – came all at once and it fucking crushed me. I shaved my head, I went full hermit, went off of social media. Between The Shadow Side record, the Black Veil record [2018’s Vale] and this record, there was a time period where I was this completely inactive bald guy who didn’t want to leave the house. And I’ve had to learn to

process that stuff and be okay with it and, as it stands now today, I feel like I know what I am a lot more. I haven't left parts of my life in the past unchecked – as much as I can remember, because again there were times where I was just blacked-out drunk and I hate that I don't have those recollections."

So how do you handle your anxieties when they come up these days?

"Work, more than anything. I immerse myself in positive things like sleeping at home when I can, working with different animal charities, trying to remember to talk to friends and not just close into myself. As annoying as it is to be the OCD guy who carries a lint roller everywhere, there are applicable uses of that. It makes me prolific; I do a lot of shit because otherwise I would go nuts. Things I do tend to be very thought out and specific, from the aesthetic of Black Veil to the concept records and everything else I've done. That's been a way of turning it into a superpower, I guess. If you have this weird thing about your brain that other people don't have, then maybe it's a gift."

You started writing a memoir around the time of *The Shadow Side*. What stage is it at now?

"It's done, pretty much, it's just unfortunate that the timing of the comic book superseded it. The book inspired me to do the comic in many ways, because when I was going back through all these areas of my life with [U.S. journalist] Ryan Downey – who is doing the book with me – I thought, 'Wow, there's kind of a ghost story to be told here.' But truth be told, most of the book is stories from my childhood. I'm not really writing a memoir because I'm not nearly experienced or old enough to tell someone the story of my life. I have what is, in my mind, an attainable, reachable position and I want to share that with people because I hate the idea of idol worship and that there is no way someone else could do this. It's bullshit; anyone can do what I do. It's just you have to be as crazy as I am to really apply yourself, and I want to share that with people."

How easy is it to separate your onstage persona from the person you are offstage? Has it changed over the last few years?

"It's easier now. I don't think it used to exist. There was no distinction between the two... I don't know, it's hard to say. In some ways I feel like I was always a character then and I'm not now. Even in Black Veil when we did the tours last year I feel like I'm an amped-up version of myself, but I'm not putting on a posture like I'm Mr Rockstar. I've been doing this for a long time. I know what I'm doing onstage and how to connect with people in an organic way. I'm obviously different in the grocery store than I am onstage, but my mental compass is pointed in the same direction."

The prevailing theme in *Black Veil Brides* has always been about the underdog fighting against the odds. Do you still feel like you're striving for something in that way?

"Yes, because I think I am more connected to what the initial message was now than



Early Black Veil Brides could not be trusted around tomato ketchup

I was back then. The initial message was to write songs about my experiences that would hopefully connect with people who felt like outsiders. Those people got behind it and emboldened me in a way that I lost the plot a little bit, when I was that age. I became almost a bully in that sense. I felt like I was this person standing up for them, but in truth I was just giving them a piss-poor performance and yelling at people."

Like it was you against the world?

"Yeah, and that's not the message. The message is connection and finding a way through music and art and all things creative to help someone ease the burden of their emotional problems. I feel like I know more about that now than I did back then because I'm not trying hard to be that person, I just am that person. I'm not trying to mask that by being the badass leader of the cartoon, leather-wearing biker gang."

At 28 you've already had a considerable career in multiple art forms. What else would you like to achieve in your life?

"I want to do everything. If you're lucky enough to make a living creating art then why wouldn't you try to do everything? If somebody came to me and said, 'We want you to design a Lego set,' hell yes I would do it. All I want to do is continue creating stuff I think is good. I don't have any education, I didn't even finish high school. I don't have any other options!"

You're a pretty high achiever for a high school dropout...

"But that's it, I have no other options so I have to achieve! What I did when I was 18 years old was take 14 boulders, put them at the top of a hill and I just started running as fast as I could. The boulder that's going to crush me is all the things I didn't do to set myself up for a reasonable, logical, financially secure adulthood. I'm just chasing my dreams trying to get away from the boulder behind me and if I can do that, if I can get to be 80 years old having done all this shit, that's the goal." *K!*

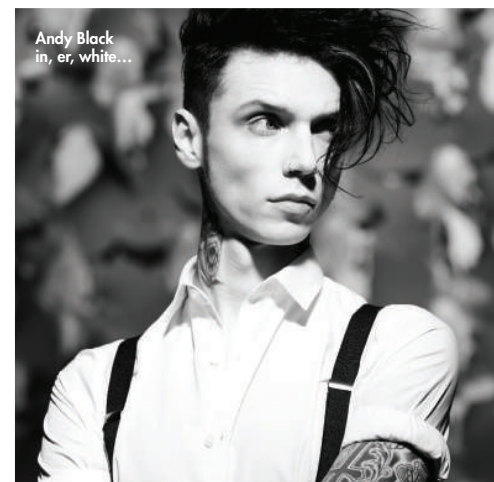
ANDY BLACK'S THE GHOST OF OHIO IS OUT ON APRIL 12 VIA REPUBLIC RECORDS



Derek Zoolander, is that you? Oh no, wait, it's just Jinxx...



Dodgy catering had given three-fifths of BVB a tummy ache



Andy Black in, er, white...