

THE
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A D R A M

And Hollywood said, "Let us make a man, and let there be ink on his skin, and let him play guitar, and hit high notes, and date models, and judge a singing competition, and act on television, and star in a movie."

And there was.

BY JENNIFER GOLDSTEIN
PHOTOS BY JAMES DIMMOCK





I'M IN MY APARTMENT TRYING TO DO SOME WORK ON MY LAPTOP, but my mind is elsewhere. It's actually at a payphone, trying to call home... Last summer was different. I wasn't stuck at a pay phone, but I did have *mo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-oves like Jagger*. Or at least I thought I did because a voice in my head told me so, over and over and over.

The voice belonged to Maroon 5 frontman Adam Levine. And if you have no idea what I'm talking about, then you probably haven't been near a radio for more than five minutes in the past few years to hear his 2011 hit "Moves Like Jagger" or the chart-topper "Payphone," from Maroon 5's most recent album, *Overexposed*. If you had, chances are they'd be on replay in your head too.

With songwriting skills and a soaring voice to match, Levine has the rare ability to create melodies that infiltrate the minds of millions. It's not an easy feat. Ph.D.'s using MRI machines to study people with songs stuck in their heads (the phenomenon has a scientific name: *spontaneous auditory imagery*) aren't able to figure out the secret sauce that makes it happen. The only thing they've been able to prove is that in order for a song to catch on, it first has to infect the songwriter.

When I share this with Levine, he nods. "I'll hum the tunes that we write in the shower because they're stuck in my head," he says. "I mean, we don't take scans of people brains, but in order for a song to work for people, it has to work for me." The strategy seems to be successful so far.

At 33, Levine's been making music for almost half his lifetime. His first band, Kara's Flowers, released an album in 1997, when he was just a senior at Brentwood School in Los Angeles. A few years later, the band—Levine, keyboardist Jesse Carmichael, bassist Mickey Madden, and drummer Ryan Dusick—teamed up with guitarist James Valentine to form Maroon 5, and they released *Songs About Jane* in 2002. That album featured the first of many hits, including "Harder to Breathe" and "This Love."

In the decade since the release, Maroon 5 has recorded three more albums (two of them with drummer Matt Flynn, who replaced Dusick in 2006). Along the way, their musical style has evolved, moving away from the funky rock-pop they started out with toward a more mainstream sound featuring synth elements, electronic drum loops, and the heavy dance beats that often dominate today's Top 40. It hasn't gone unnoticed by music critics, many of whom criticized *Overexposed* for sounding overproduced. But Levine doesn't lose sleep over it.

"Music critics are all fucking idiots," he says two minutes into our interview, which took place two weeks after the album's release. "The way that we make our records is no different from the way that certain bands make their records with just as much programming, just as many loops, and just as much fairy dust as we use."

The thing is, most of those other bands don't go into the record-making process with the goal of being popular—or at least they don't admit it. Levine,

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however, has never been shy about his love of attention or living a life that garners plenty of it (he has a string of model ex-girlfriends, a home in the Hollywood Hills, and a Harley Fat Boy, Aston Martin DB9, and vintage Porsche 356). In fact, he is refreshingly honest about wanting to broaden his fan base. "There can only be so many bands that make raw, organic records that sound great. ... If I wanted to make a record that was super self-indulgent and all about the art I would, but I'd rather take those skills and apply them to something else, which is gathering a huge audience to appreciate the music."

He knows his approach may put off some people, but at least it's genuine. "There's obviously a certain balance between pursuing an audience and pursuing what you love to do, but I love what we do. ... I would never put out a record I didn't want to listen to." And it's obvious he's not the only one listening. *Overexposed* debuted at number two on the *Billboard* 200 chart, and "Payphone" reached number one on the *Billboard* Hot AC and Top 40 charts. Levine relishes the success. "I get off on that ability to connect with a large group of people. That's what I aim for when we're making music," he says. "I'd much rather be able to go to Indonesia and sing a song that we wrote and have everyone sing the words than be hiding and playing in a little club."

Don't think Levine is too obtuse to realize the way he sounds when he makes statements like that (he and his bandmates were self-aware enough to call the album *Overexposed*). He knows he's portrayed in the media as an overconfident attention seeker. But if he really were as cocksure and in need of acceptance as some of the haters assume, you'd think he would have made some calculated statements to try and change that perception. But he doesn't; he talks honestly and unguardedly. Five minutes into a conversation you can tell his reputation as a douchebag—a descriptor mentioned by more than one million web pages—is unwarranted. That's also obvious to anyone who has watched NBC's *The Voice*, where he gives out bro-hugs and thoughtful advice to up-and-coming singers and tries (but not that hard) to ignore the bait when fellow judge Christina Aguilera puffs out her cleavage and takes a dig at him.

Levine aims to please off-camera as well. During our INKED cover shoot, he took time to chat with the guys from the All American Car Club, who lent him their rides for the day. He snapped a photo with the intern who was practically hyperventilating when she asked. And he braved the blazing-hot sidewalks of Brooklyn wearing combat boots and work pants in 95-degree heat, even going so far as to throw around a Nerf football with some onlookers while the rest of the crew cowered in the shade eating Italian ices.

So he's either a nice guy or a really good actor, which would bode well for his next career move. In October, Levine makes his acting debut on the sec-





ond season of FX's *American Horror Story*, in which he has a top-secret role as one half of a couple that (possibly) meets a gory, tragic end. Whether he's a good actor remains to be seen. But he's certainly got the charisma—and a comedian's sense of timing. When I ask him his favorite curse word, he replies immediately: "Fuck." So I ask him what he likes to do to blow off steam and, without missing a beat, he answers, "Fuck," then maintains a Blue-Steelish gaze for a second before slumping into his armchair and laughing. "No, really, it's yoga," he clarifies.

The practice has inspired at least one of Levine's tattoos, the Sanskrit word *tapas* inked above his heart. "The meaning is a little bit loose and can get misinterpreted, but when applied to talking about yoga, it has to do with my fire or determination for the practice," he says. "It's a personal thing. That's kind of why I put it in a place that's a bit more hidden." Not all his tattoos are quite as meaningful. Some are just there to look good, like his most recent piece, a string of beads around his neck. "I was in Japan and I got this necklace. I'm not sure why I got it—I think I was bored. But I like it."

A lot of his other black-and-gray work was done by Bryan Randolph, who works out of Spider Murphy's Tattoo in San Francisco. He also has a heart with a scroll that says *Mom* from Amsterdam's Hanky Panky (Henk Schiffmacher) and a dove by Baby Ray of Spotlight Tattoo in Los Angeles. He got the dove at 21; it was his first piece, and Baby Ray treated him accordingly. "After he did the tattoo he made me go across the street and get him a pack of cigarettes," Levine says. "You have to give those guys credit, they're probably sick and tired of people screwing around and coming into the shop and not getting anything, so I totally understand the attitude of, 'Are you wasting my time or are we really going to do this?'"

He's not planning any new work at the moment, and that might be because he's in the process of filming his first movie, John Carney's *Can a Love Song Save Your Life?*, which is being coproduced by Judd Apatow. Tattoos wouldn't be out of place on his character, a musician who moves to New York City with his girlfriend (played by Keira Knightley), but who's to say his next role will be the same? Every additional tattoo is more time in the makeup chair for cover-ups.

For now, it may be too soon to contemplate his future in movies. Acting is still new to him and it's something he's uncharacteristically humble about. "It's challenging," he says. "The first thing I did when I got the job was ask friends who are actors what the fuck I was supposed to do." This admission proves he's not divine, but human after all—and with the year he's been having, we were starting to wonder. ■

Stylist: Djuna Bel
Stylist assistant: Taryn Shumway
Grooming: Daniella for Workgroup using Oribe
Location: Fast Ashleys
Cars: Special Thanks to Mike Matarazzo and George Rodriguez of All American Car Club of NYC

Pages 44-45: Dr. Martens shirt; Paul Smith sunglasses; Levine's own A.P.C. jeans and Rolex watch (throughout). Pages 46-47: Vintage tank top from Search & Destroy; stylist's own Ray-Ban sunglasses; Levine's own Dickies pants (throughout). Pages 48-49: Vintage tank top from Grand St. Bakery, in Brooklyn, NY. Pages 50-51: Stylist's own vintage Hawaiian shirt.