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andwerve: v: to turn against. *andwerve* is a selective online and print literary journal based out of los angeles, ca, which, as the name suggests, was created out of a need to recognize, celebrate and publish highly unique and often experimental artists who have turned against the established modes of expression suitable for the inboxes of commercial and academic publishers. this space is thus home to art and literature that pushes the boundaries of self and society through fiction, non-fiction, poetry, photography, painting and design. our issues comprised of outstanding examples within each medium are published online at the beginning of each month; an annual editor's edition including the most innovative work from each month is published at each year's end and will be distributed throughout the los angeles area and the greater region of southern california.



Etan G with guitar legend B.B. King

andwerve's September 06 Featured Artist, Etan G, is more than a performer; he is also involved in production and is Vice President of Group 8 Productions in Hollywood . His company does video-editing and recording, and has worked with such big names as Disney, Dreamworks, and Steven Spielberg. Etan has also done soundtrack/songs for a number of movies, and is currently working on a project with George Clinton of Parliament, the legendary king of funk himself. If you look at Etan's [webpage](#), you'll see him photographed with Steven Spielberg, Stevie Wonder, Sting, Tom Cruise, Dave Chapelle, L.L Cool J, Gwen Stefani, Run DMC, and many more Hollywood and Music Greats. The fact that Etan is involved in the entertainment industry isn't unique. The fact that he is an Orthodox Jewish Rapper is, and inside this brank-spanking-new issue of *andwerve* Etan G will discuss how he reconciles these two seemingly opposite sides of his life. View the September 06 issue by clicking [here](#).

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andwerve: where style departs from fashion



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September 06 Featured Artist: Etan G

The Jewish Rapper
 An Interview with Etan G
 By N Marion Hage

“What’s a nice Jewish boy like you doing in a place like this?” This archetypical question has been heard since the earliest days of entertainment, in movies and television shows alike. Society and sub-cultures are known for having rigid expectations. The Amish, in their black hats and black coats, are not supposed to break-dance, and Orthodox Jews are not supposed to rap.

Things change, but also stay very much the same. Some attempt to stretch boundaries, while others resist and oppose such attempts. When I got a message that the “Jewish Rapper” was interested in being interviewed, I wasn’t quite sure where it would go, but I went with it and now I’m glad I did.

Etan G is more than a performer; he is also involved in production, and is Vice President of Group 8 Productions in Hollywood . His company does video-editing and recording, and has worked with such big names as Disney, Dreamworks, and Steven Spielberg. Etan has also done soundtrack/songs for a number of movies, and is currently working on a project with George Clinton of Parliament, the legendary king of funk himself.

If you look at Etan’s webpage, you’ll see him photographed with Steven Spielberg, Stevie Wonder, Sting, Tom Cruise, Dave Chapelle, L.L Cool J, Gwen Stefani, Run DMC, and many more Hollywood and Music Greats.

The fact that Etan is involved in the entertainment industry isn’t unique. The fact that he is an Orthodox Jewish Rapper is, and I wanted to discuss how he reconciles these two seemingly opposite sides of his life.

Question: “Etan, I heard you were a guest on the Howard Stern show. I read some of your lyrics, and some have a Psalmic quality. Where’s the connection?”

Answer: “Howard’s a funny guy, and he’s also Jewish, having come from the hub of Judaism in New York City . There are parts of the show’s content I’d disagree with, but I respect the guy because he’s not afraid to comment on issues. In some respects he sits on top of the world, but he also knows what it’s like to be the underdog, and hated. He also makes me laugh.”

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Q: “Did he take you seriously or poke fun at you?”

A: “I think he was intrigued, because in some ways he’s fought against convention his whole life and he sees this Jewish Rapper and wants to know where I’m coming from, if this is really me or my shtick. I was always very different. When I was fourteen, I was breakdancing in the lobby of the Synagogue, and listening to rappers. You see, there is a stereotype of what a Jew is, especially an Orthodox Jew. In a sense, life is about finding out who you are and if that means being different, you are being more true to yourself if you follow your heart. I didn’t want to become a parody of a Jewish kid trying to be accepted, trying to “black it up” by mimicking what Black Artists were doing. Some Jewish kids have done that, and it doesn’t seem real to me. I took what I loved and put my own unique spin on it, saying through Rap what was important to me.”

Q: “Well, you have to respect black cultures’ contributions to the music industry. What form of music didn’t they start beside the classics? Black artists started blues, rock, R&B, hip hop, and rap.”

A: “That’s true. From a creative side Black Culture has taken the lead in speech, dress and music. And we have to acknowledge that contribution. But we go from there, and we can either try to be what people expect us to be, what they try to mold us to be, or we can try to be honest, and take risks.”

Q: “Well, you say that you are an Orthodox Jew, and have a deeply religious side. It seems that you risk being in a no-man’s land of offending Orthodox Jews, and not being taken seriously by the industry because of being an Orthodox Jew.”

A: There are some who disagree with what I’m doing. They hate anything that seems secular, and refer to it as “that damn street music.” But there are Orthodox Jews who are supportive, and at least willing to listen. I’m not alone in treading these waters, though I was one of the first. Artists like Matisyahu, are getting lots of attention now, doing reggae and other styles. We have Schlock Rock which is the Jewish version of Weird Al parodying famous songs. But we don’t want to simply be the Jewish version of this or that. We want to break down barriers. We feel we have important things to say, and we just feel comfortable speaking in the languages we grew up loving.

Q: By nature, I can see throughout history that many religious people have tried to be insular in attempts to protect their children from what they thought were corrupting influences. I wasn’t any symbol of purity growing up, but when I raised my kids that was the toughest question I asked myself, “How do I give my children the greatest freedom without exposing them to potential danger?” I understand where different groups are coming from, but I think striking the balance of creating a healthy environment as a goal can also produce the unwanted outcome of putting people in chains in the process. When it comes to traditions, things can take on a life of their own, and certainly go

too far. I still don't know where lines should or shouldn't be drawn, but I imagine some within your community think you've crossed the line?"

A: "What I do is try to be true to me. Since you've brought up the subject of God and religion, I can't imagine God giving us this whole big world to enjoy, only to have us insulate ourselves to the point where we can never be ourselves or enjoy life. Our traditions tell us that Jews are a light unto the nations. How can you do that if you are in a box where nobody can ever see you? You have to use your gifts, and take some chances. People don't always get me; but that doesn't mean I don't have anything to say. My rap is both entertaining and thought provoking. And as far as the rap community, which is mostly the black community, they have been very kind to me and haven't put up walls. I've been a guest at the Black Entertainment Awards a number of times, and met prominent black producers and entertainers; and you can see some of them at my photo gallery.

Q: "How did you get started?"

A: At first I tried to do what everyone told me I should do. I got a master's degree, and taught. I tried business, but it wasn't me. I found myself floundering there. I'd start a business with one partner and I'd get ripped off, or something wouldn't work in another thing I started. Then I was in a car accident and while I was in a hospital bed thinking about my life I said, "This road isn't for me." So, I became a roadie for the group Evan and Jaron, who did the song, "Crazy for this girl", and got to meet people in the industry and see the stuff going on behind the scenes. I met musicians, the groups Heart and Fleetwood Mac, and believed I saw my destiny in music. Some would say I have this crazy side and I loved making people laugh. Doing rap music was more true to who I was than being a teacher or businessman. If you look at my site, you'll see that I was on the Discovery Channel TV show "No Opportunity Wasted", and I didn't want to waste my life. I believe rap is my forum to be relevant, so that when I look back on life it's not with regret. Instead of being what people tell me to be, I was true to who I was. I look at King David, and doubt he fit people's expectations. He expressed himself in the Psalms. He's a king, and people had expectations of how he should act and what he should say. But if you look at the content, here is the king of the nation exposing his sins to the nation, saying, "This is really who I am." That's a risky thing for someone to do, to be open and honest. Some loved him for it, and some hated him for it.

Final note: Etan is a very thoughtful and thought provoking person, a family man in touch with what's happening in the world. We talked about many deep things, culture, spirituality, wisdom, and how we each have different ways of expressing. Rap music, like poetry and art, is its own voice of _expression, one that many listen to and enjoy. He observed, "Rap is built around metaphors and allegory, but this isn't something new. It's as old as the Psalms of King David. In some of our communities we were encouraged to take one of two roads. We could become a doctor or go into business. These were seen as legitimate vocations. But when you think about it, doctors aren't limited to one community.

They treat and interact with people from every walk of life. I'd like to see parents supporting their children in the creative arts. In my view, this is no less honorable or spiritual."

Visit [here](#) to listen to samples of Etan G's work. A big thanks to Etan G for stopping by with us.

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Addendum to story.

Submitted by N Marion Hage on Sat, 2006-09-16 22:47.

I was pleased to hear positive comments coming from the Orthodox Jewish community regarding Etan's story, seeing it as "fun", and wanted to pass them on. If any one wants to comment in the future, I hope you will feel free to post your comments here. One of Etan's concerns was that some within the Orthodox community might mistake his outlook on life choices or even statements he'd made here for flippancy, which couldn't be further from the truth. My addendum regarding Etan's absolute respect for the Torah didn't reach the editors in time to make this issue. - one of these days I'll stop making rookie errors!!! (laughs) Thanks for your patience Etan.

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