

# The Weekend, smooth yet steamy, makes quick return

Just one year after he catapulted into the ranks of top pop stars, The Weeknd has returned with a sprawling new album in which his silky voice goes into steamier territory. "Starboy," the third studio album by the Toronto singer, stretches for 18 songs plus an accompanying short film and is full of star collaborations including with the elusive French electronic duo Daft Punk.

The album came out Friday, almost exactly a year after the artist whose real name is Abel Tesfaye released his breakthrough "Beauty Behind the Madness," which topped the charts through mega-hits such as "Can't Feel My Face."

As evidenced by his quick and voluminous return, the 26-year-old has no shortage of ideas for his latest album with tracks that take cues from hip-hop to 1980s New Wave. But the album's overall vibe is steaminess, as if "Starboy" takes place in a packed but chilled-out nightclub in the early hours of the morning. The Weeknd's defining trait remains his celebrated voice, strong yet smooth with a comfortable falsetto. On the tracks such as "Secrets," The Weeknd also shows his ease at lower ranges.

## Chemistry with Daft Punk

"Starboy" marks the highest-profile project by Daft Punk since the duo, longtime leaders of the French house scene, won worldwide mainstream acclaim with the 2013 album "Random Access Memories."

Daft Punk injects a heavy bass that drives the title track and closes the album with a retro R&B feel on "I Feel It Coming"—a track that reinforces the oft-noted vocal similarities between The Weeknd and Michael Jackson. While Daft Punk is only credited as featured collaborators on the two tracks, the French duo's influence can be heard throughout "Starboy" with its embrace of audio filters and a minimalist production that emphasizes beats and The Weeknd's voice rather than synthetic effects.

The Weeknd said he had become friends with Daft Punk's Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo and went into the duo's studio in Paris, with the three men experimenting with sounds and recording the two songs in just a few days.

The Weeknd said it had always been on his "bucket list" to work with the "enigmatic and mysterious" members of Daft Punk, who never appear in public outside of their robotic disguises. "I was definitely inspired by that at the beginning of my career because nobody knew how I looked as well," he told Apple Music's Beats 1 radio.

The Weeknd, who grew up with humble means as the son of Ethiopian immigrants, made his name by posting recordings on YouTube, winning fame online despite his anonymity.

## 'Homeless to Forbes list'

The quick earning of riches is much on the mind of The Weeknd, who topped the Forbes magazine list of top-grossing

celebrity newcomers of 2016 with \$55 million earned. Much of the lyricism on the album recalls braggadocio rap as The Weeknd—or perhaps his alter ego "Starboy"—lists off the money he earns, the cars he drives and the women he woos.

"Homeless to Forbes list / These niggas bring no stress," he sings on "Sidewalks," a collaboration with leading rapper Kendrick Lamar. "I feel like Moses. I feel like I'm chosen," he sings. Lana Del Rey imagines an erotic encounter as she sings on "Stargirl Interlude"—an apt collaboration with Del Rey's music fitting in with the album's breathy mood.

Yet The Weeknd is also reflective, especially as the album nears its end. On "Ordinary Life," he sings of a sexual experience with another woman he barely knows. "If I could, I'd trade it all / Trade it for a halo," he sings as he ominously suggests, "Like I'm James Dean, I'mma die when I young." — AFP

**Recording artist The Weeknd performs onstage during the 2016 American Music Awards at Microsoft Theater on November 20, 2016 in Los Angeles, California. — AP**



This file photo taken on October 10, 2016 shows Pilot Pedro Langdon flying his Travel Air 4000 biplane during a photo call for the launch of the Vintage Air Rally in Shoreham, Sussex. — AFP

# MISSING VINTAGE RALLY PILOT TURNS UP IN SOUTH SUDAN

A maverick 72-year-old British pilot taking part in a vintage air rally turned up in South Sudan yesterday after going missing for a second time when the event arrived in Kenya.

Maurice Kirk is one of about a dozen pilots flying vintage biplanes across Africa, but has repeatedly run afoul of organizers for failing to stick to rules and regulations and a Facebook post from organizers said that after the Kenya leg he was "no longer part of the rally."

Kirk first went missing on Wednesday, but was later found and joined his colleagues in Gambella in western Ethiopia, where they were detained by authorities for two days over a problem with their flight permits.

While the team was released and continued their journey onward to Kenya, Vintage Air Rally (VAR) organizers announced on Facebook Friday that Kirk was a "no-show." However he turned up several hours later. "Maurice is safe! We heard he had an engine failure and landed (not at an airfield) in South Sudan but had a puncture on landing," an update said yesterday. "Locals found him and called a Brit in Juba they recently worked for. He contacted the British embassy in Juba."

Kirk, who dubs himself the Flying Vet for his days as a veterinarian, is a colorful character who describes himself on his blog as a "chronic litigant" who is embroiled in dozens of court cases in Britain.

In 2005 he was injured when he crash-landed in Japan on a solo bid to fly around the world in a vintage plane and in 2008 he crashed in the Caribbean. He was rescued then by US coastguards, and to express his gratitude he later dropped in on the Texas ranch of former US president George Bush and was briefly placed in a psychiatric clinic.

While pilots of 1920s and 1930s vintage biplanes set off on November 12 from the Greek island of Crete on their 13,000 kilometer journey to Cape Town, Kirk joined on Sunday in his 1943 Piper club plane.

Aside from Kirk's antics, the rally has seen plenty of drama. Organizers explained in a press release Saturday that a last-minute problem with flight permits led to them being detained in Ethiopia as it was too late to inform teams who had already taken to the skies.

"On arrival, the crews had their phones and other electronics confiscated and spent two nights detained, sleeping on concrete floors without air conditioning or protection from mosquitoes (in a malaria zone)," read the statement. "All requests for consular assistance were refused, and it was only by the use of a smuggled telephone that the VAR team were able to alert the outside world to their predicament." — AFP

# Prisons chief aims to make the 'hard time' a rehearsal for home

When he got his first post as a warden 20 years ago, Kevin Kempf looked around the prison yard and decided everything green had to go. Trees, shrubs, even the rosebushes at the state prison in the mountain town of Orofino were ripped out, leaving nothing but an empty yard. "It's just stupid - that was our mindset," says Kempf, who now heads Idaho's correction agency. "You don't have to remind inmates every minute of every day that they are inmates."

Today, Kempf is one of a handful of US corrections leaders trying a different approach, modeled on the progressive "open" prison systems of Norway, Germany and some other European countries. The differences between "open prisons" and America's traditional "closed" lockups couldn't be starker.

At the Idaho State Correctional Center in Orofino, for example, every part of life reinforces to occupants that they are first and foremost prisoners, from the barren walls to the tiny, impact-proof windows. Inmates often get only two choices a day: whether to have a breakfast tray brought to their cell and whether to spend an hour in the recreation yard. Inmates at Norway's Halden prison, however, are treated much like free people. They wear their own clothes, buy their own food at a prison market and prepare it in a fully stocked kitchen. They are expected to go to school or work every day - with both options available on prison grounds - and they might spend their free time recording music in the prison studio, strolling across the tree-covered property, or watching TV on a flat-screen in their dorm-like cell.

## Firsthand experience

Kempf was sold on Norway's approach after seeing it firsthand earlier this year. He and other Idaho officials spent a week examining European prisons, courtesy of the Prison Law Office, an inmate civil rights law firm in Berkeley, California. "We came back totally converted," Kempf said. "It made a lot of sense for increasing public safety and, frankly, increasing the safety of our staff."

Kempf acknowledges modeling prisons after the wealthy welfare state of Norway is a tough sell in Idaho, one of America's reddest states. At least one lawmaker, however, is already convinced. "What kind of person do we want leaving our prison?" asked Rep. Rick Youngblood, a Nampa Republican who accompanied Kempf on the trip. "It's this concept of working with people and trying to bring some normalcy into the system, where when they leave, that's what they'll hope to experience when they get out."

Prison Law Office executive director Don Specter began sending correction officials to see Europe's prisons in 2011 after he decided inmate civil rights lawsuits weren't doing enough to change the culture of punishment inside most US prisons.

So far, officials from states including North Dakota, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Georgia, Colorado and Pennsylvania have made the trip, resulting in varying impacts back home. "The systems that have benefited the most besides Idaho are Pennsylvania and North Dakota," Specter said. "In both cases, the directors, like Kevin (Kempf), came back with a genuine belief that prison can be more humane than it currently is while still maintaining security and appropriately housing prisoners."

In Norway, the imprisonment itself is the punishment, Specter said, and prisons are treated as training grounds for the inmates' eventual release. That approach has lowered recidivism rates and

improved prison workers' mental health, he said. "The harsh conditions that affect both the prisoners and the corrections officers working there are counterproductive to the main goal, which is to create better neighbors," Specter said.

## Role models

Correctional officers in open prisons are expected to be role models, and their duties include talking to inmates and helping them navigate daily life. That might mean assisting them with homework, coaching them before a job interview or just playing volleyball if the prisoner team is short a man. They make sure the inmates are not just safe and secure but are being productive, Specter said. The same values could be applied in the US, Specter said. But changing the culture in an American prison isn't easy. Norway's prisons have much bigger budgets than most US correctional centers, and Norway lacks the gang problem common in American prisons.



This June 15, 2010 file photo shows the Idaho Correctional Center south of Boise, Idaho. — AP

Most American correctional officers have been trained to remain emotionally distant from inmates, a skill thought to make the staffers less susceptible to manipulation. But the dreary atmosphere and high-stress nature of the job lead to high levels of burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder, Kempf said.

He's directing staffers to begin taking a more personal, yet still professional, interest in prisoners, in hopes that it helps attitudes and outcomes for everyone. He's also examining changes in the way inmates are disciplined for breaking some prison rules, to ensure the response is proportional to the offense.

Kempf is focusing on changes he can make administratively without increasing the budget. Idaho's prisons won't ever look like Norway's, but many of the principles can be incorporated, he said. "We're still dealing, at the end of the day, with inmates that are broken," Kempf said. "We need to do what we can to make people better, not make them worse." — AP

# Singer-songwriter dumps LA for Iowa farm to do it her way

Lissie Maurus takes the stage and the members of the standing-room crowd immediately begin to sway like old friends when they hear her raspy, bluesy voice. "I could've been a hero, I could've been a zero, I could've been all these things."

This concert in Chicago is a homecoming of sorts for the singer-songwriter, a native of Rock Island, Illinois. Many family members are in the audience, and she's glad to see them after months on the road.

Still, though the energy that is high, the lyrics of many of her songs tell of loves lost and a career that hasn't quite turned out the way she'd expected or hoped. "I could've been nothing, I could've been something, I could've been all these things."

Lissie, as she is known to her fans, was well on her way to making it a decade ago, when she was in her early 20s. She had a deal with Columbia Records UK and a first album that went gold in the United Kingdom and Norway. Tens of thousands of people bought that album. Critics raved. But after her second album didn't sell as well, she found herself without that record deal and at a crossroads.

What kind of artist did she want to be? Was her pursuit of fame really worth it? What would it now mean to "make it"?

She opted for uncharted territory: She left Los Angeles, bought a farm in Iowa and set herself up as an independent artist. It can be a more viable model in this time when singers can reach potential fans more easily via music streaming services and online sales. But there certainly are no guarantees for her or anyone else who takes this route.

"Underneath the table, 'Hope for gold, Where it stops, nobody knows.' Even as a child, the sassy towhead with freckles had some pipes - and Lissie liked the notion that her talent could lead to fame. In third grade, she landed the lead in the musical "Annie" at the dinner theater in her hometown. "My mom would say that my eyes would light up as soon as I got on the stage," she says.

The daughter of an obstetrician and an interior designer, she had plenty of opportunity, but she was rebellious, cutting off her

hair, piercing her nose and becoming more of a loner. After a run-in with a teacher that landed her in jail briefly, she finished high school in an alternative program.

## But she never gave up on her music

She spent a couple years in college in Colorado, then ended up at a performing arts program in LA. There, she honed her skills and material on Wednesday nights at a bar with a group of performers who dubbed themselves the Beachwood Rockers' Society. And gigs started coming. It was at the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas, that a big break came when Mike Smith, then an executive with Columbia Records UK, happened upon Lissie.

Pouring rain had prompted him to duck for cover inside a dive bar and he heard her voice from a back room. Her talent was still raw then, he says. But he heard something her voice. He watched her stamp her foot to keep the beat, her tousled hair waving back and forth. He liked her rocker vibe and blues edge. "I was just really taken with her," he now says.

Columbia signed her in 2006, and four years later, she finally released her first album, "Catching a Tiger." It solidified her fan base in Europe and also in her native Midwest after Fat Possum Records released the album in this country. But then Smith and another of Lissie's champions left the label, before her second album came out - unfortunate timing, he now concedes. Already, the lyrics on her second album were hinting at disillusionment:

"I don't want to be famous 'if I got to be shameless.' 'If you don't know what my name is, 'So what?'"

The new regime dropped her. And Lissie, who was then living in Ojai, California, outside LA, let the news sink in. "I was a little bit afraid, and I felt like I'd failed a little bit," she said. Mostly, she says she felt relieved. Yes, she'd learned at the label, with its exposure and resources. But she also was frustrated by a process - demands to write more, delays in getting a finished record out, being told her songs weren't good enough. That became "soul-destroying," she says.

Her longtime manager, Peter Leak, who's represented such artists as Dido and 10,000 Maniacs, said Lissie thought he would "freak out" when she decided to leave LA behind. "But actually, I thought it was a great idea," he says, noting that going independent suited her somewhat rebellious nature.

In mid-2015, she took her savings and bought that farm in northeastern Iowa. The farm, surrounded by fields of withered cornstalks, is slowly becoming home. Lissie has put her personal touches on the house, including funky wallpaper with birds in the kitchen. She's also started a mural with a big red heart on one of the smaller buildings, and talks about turning the barn into a recording studio. She rolls up for the interview in her pickup truck with her dog, Byron, in tow. Her companion at home, he stays



with her parents when she's away. When she first arrived in Iowa last year, she had already written some new songs. So she called producer and bass player Curt Schneider, with whom she'd developed a good chemistry. Together, they wrote the title track on her latest album, "My Wild West." "I think she tried or a long time to be how the establishment wanted her to be," Schneider says. "What's not common is for someone to be brave enough to say, 'I'm done trying to satisfy other people.'"

The album came out in February, with more good reviews. (Lissie also recently released a live acoustic album, recorded at Union Chapel in North London.) Smith, the former Columbia exec, says Lissie's new work is, in many ways, "melodically, the strongest record she's put out." She's been touring in the United States and Europe much of this year, and she acknowledges the traveling can be brutal. But because her overhead is low, most of what she makes in ticket and merchandise sales is hers. Financially, she says, this could be her best year yet.

A recent show in Minneapolis, for instance, was sold out at a venue that holds about 625 people. In this case, it was just Lissie, her acoustic guitar and a microphone - not unlike those early days. Her work has been getting radio airplay there, and many members of the crowd sang along:

"Don't you give up on me" "As I dive into the dark" "Slip into the endless sea." "Don't you give up on me." Back in Iowa, she walks down to the pond at her farm and stands on an old bench to survey what is now hers. She'd love to have a couple of bigger hits to sustain her career over the long run, she says. But fame is no longer the end game; her version of success is different and she says that's fine. Here, she envisions writing some of her best work. "It's been freeing," she says. "It's been fun again!" — AP

**In this Oct 3, 2016 photo, singer Lissie Maurus sits on her front porch at her Iowa farm. — AP**