



THERE'S
SOMETHING
ABOUT

LENNY

LENNY KRAVITZ IS BACK WITH AN EPIC ALBUM AND GIVES US GLIMPSE INTO A LIFE STUFFED WITH

BY ERICKA BLOUNT DANOIS PHOTOGRAPHY BY CLIFF WATTS STYLING BY JOHN MOORE



A MASHUP OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS.

Kravitz's fifth year of life looms large in his memory. His father, Sy Kravitz, had begun working as a promoter for artists such as Miles Davis and Sarah Vaughan. Little Lenny hung out with Duke Ellington at the Rainbow Room during sound checks, and on his birthday, he sat on Ellington's lap as the jazz legend and his saxophone player, Paul Gonsalves, played "Happy Birthday" for him. It was the year he would fantasize that he was the Jackson 5's long lost brother—and the year his dad surprised him with tickets to see them live at Madison Square Garden.

"I remember all the flashbulbs going off. They sang "The Love You Save" and I lost my mind. Aretha Franklin sat next to us; she had on this white fur stole with the matching fur hat. The music just hit me," Kravitz reminisces, sitting on a couch at the Greenwich Hotel, one leg folded under him, still thrilled by the moment he found his calling.

Before Kravitz's mother, Roxie Roker, became well-known as Helen Willis on *The Jeffersons*, she was a Broadway actress who had studied at the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. An early television appearance of hers was as cohost of the PBS show *Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant*, one of the first black-oriented series in New York.

The show taped once a week, and Roker's day job was working as a secretary at NBC, where she met Kravitz's father, who was working there as a page and would eventually become a producer for the network.

When the family moved to L.A. for his mother to do *The Jeffersons*, Kravitz didn't so much attend Beverly Hills High School as he was enrolled. His classmates included Slash, who eventually became the lead guitarist for Guns N' Roses (and who reconnected with him later after an awards show, telling Kravitz: "I love your music. Me and my girlfriend f--- to your songs!"); Jill Jones, who was singing backup for Teena Marie at the time (whom her mother also managed); and Jill's friend, future actress

The manic energy of Manhattan morphs into slow motion as Lenny Kravitz walks the streets of the Meatpacking District. He's uncharacteristically conservative in a black oxford shirt, David Ruffin-style glasses, a gray blazer, and a peacoat while click-clacking across the cobblestone streets in what he calls "church shoes." Heads swivel. Bartenders dart out of saloons, asking in broken English to take a picture with him. Women with their daughters swoon: "He's so cute!" Soon the pace picks up as the paparazzi begin to swarm—on bicycles, on foot, seeming to rise from potholes, snapping with their industrial-size zoom lenses from windows above. Still, Kravitz stays at the same speed, obliging everyone, bending down to pet the dogs of a lady struggling with six of them on a leash, not flustered, cracking jokes, and having a good time.

He doesn't travel with an entourage or a security guard or even a pet toy poodle. "He's cool with everybody when we walk the streets in New Orleans," says Trombone Shorty, who guests on Kravitz's new album, *Black and White America*, and occasionally cameos on the HBO series *Treme*. Kravitz bought his first home ever in the N.O. on a whim after visiting one year for Jazz Fest. He moved into a dilapidated house and never moved back to New York. Shorty continues, "He talks to everybody. He's just a cool cat."

"I think the fact that he raised a child on his own has made him an

"I love your music. Me and my

incredibly balanced man," says singer and former Prince protégée Jill Jones, referring to his and ex-wife Lisa Bonet's daughter, Zoë. Now an actress and singer, Zoë lived with him from ages 11 to 19. "There's nothing like your teenager to put you in your place."

"He never lost touch with his old friends," adds Jones, who went to Beverly Hills High School with him. "I think that keeps him strong and grounded. At his cookouts and barbecues, people are there from our high school years. That rock star stuff, it only goes so far."

But a rock star he is. He's jammed with James Brown; collaborated with Mick Jagger, Slash, Michael Jackson, Jay-Z, Mos Def, Quincy Jones, Curtis Mayfield, David Bowie, Al Green, Steven Tyler, Robert Plant, Prince, Stevie Wonder, and Bob Dylan; sang classical music with the California Boys Choir as a teen; wrote and produced Madonna's "Justify My Love," Vanessa Paradis' (Johnny Depp's paramour) third album, and Labelle's 2008 comeback album; dated actress Nicole Kidman and supermodel Adriana Lima; and the list goes on. Even as a child, he was always at the center of an orbit of stars.

Gina Gershon. "Lenny would move easily through all the groups. There were black kids who hung together in the cafeteria, the geeks, the Asians, surfers, the rocker kids. He hung with all of them," says Jones.

"I was the kid they knew was different. They knew who my parents were and would call them Mr. Day and Mrs. Night, or they'd call me zebra," says Kravitz in reference to his white Jewish father and his black mother. "I didn't stick to one group, and I ended up listening to all kinds of music," he remembers.

In those days, he would spend a lot of time jamming with his friends and going to see musicians live. One night he wanted to see virtuoso drummer Buddy Rich. "You [just] went out last night," was his father's stern reply. "But it's Buddy Rich," Kravitz pleaded.

"We got into this argument," Kravitz says. "Lawd have mercy, and he's like, 'I'm tired of this,' and he's shaking. 'Well, if you go, that's it, you're out!'"

A man with short dark hair, wearing thick black-rimmed glasses, a nose ring, and a small hoop earring. He is dressed in a dark, textured suit jacket over a dark shirt and a light-colored tie. He has a thoughtful expression, with his right hand resting against his chin. The background is a white brick wall with black graffiti, including a large white outline of a person's head and shoulders on the left and several circular patterns on the right.

girlfriend *f--- to your songs!*”

Coat by InAisce, suit by Calvin Klein Collection, shirt by DSquared, tie by John Varvatos, glasses by Givenchy.





Opposite page: Tank by **Rick Owens**, shorts by **Givenchy**,
leggings by **With & Wessel**, boots by **Jeremy Scott**, necklace
by **Dominic Louis**.

This page: Jacket and glasses by **Rad Hourani**, tank and boots by
Rick Owens, pants, Lenny's own.

“I was like, ‘I’m done, I’m out, I’m gonna go see Buddy Rich, dammit!’” He called his friend Zoro (who eventually became a drummer for New Edition), packed his bag, and went to Disneyland, where Rich played a fantastic set. “Then I was like, ‘Okay, now where the hell am I going?!’”

And so Kravitz became homeless by choice. He slept anywhere he could, mostly on friends’ couches and floors and in recording studios, before he found out he could rent a pea green Ford Pinto for \$4.99 a day. He would park, inch the seat back, grab his blanket, and sleep in the car with just his bag and his guitar, often waking up to police tapping on the window. He still went to school, mostly for his mother, with whom he was still extremely close: “I had to finish for her because she was the first [in her family] to go to college.” He would come home occasionally but spent most of his time in studio sessions and gigging around town with his band. On occasion, someone would take him in. One of them was a lady who pushed a 1957 pink Thunderbird with a license plate that read “Lady T.”

Teena Marie became like his big sister. “She would cook a lot. It was her and Penny Johnson, Rick James’ little sister. They looked after me, fed me. She took me to concerts. She took care of a lot of folks. The big reason why I am here [is] because of this sister. She was for real,” Kravitz recalls.

Lady T. helped him out musically, too, giving him instruments and taking him to studio sessions, where he learned the ropes watching her. “She was self-contained, a multi-instrumentalist, a writer, producer. She was so talented.” Heartbroken when she died last year, he immediately called her family, asking if there was anything he could do for them.

When he was offered his first record deal at age 18 from A&M Records, the label of the Police and Janet Jackson, it would seem to be a no-brainer that he would pull out a pen from the glove compartment of his rented Ford Pinto and sign on the spot. But when the label asked him to join a group, saying that his music needed more of a pop sensibility, Kravitz envisioned a short-term future and refused.

“I couldn’t do it,” he says. “To this day I don’t know what made me say no; I guess it was a spirit thing. My friends were like, ‘What the f--- is wrong with you? You’re living in a car and you won’t sign?!’ But if I had said yes, I would be done. I wouldn’t be here.”

When he learned that his mother was suffering from breast cancer, he traveled the world in search of something to help her. He did the same for Jones’ mother right before she passed.

“He still had to work right after his mom died. She was an awesome individual—a dignified sister,” remembers R&B songstress Angie Stone, who played saxophone and sang background vocals in Kravitz’s band in 1989. “He was broken, but she prepared him to deal with life and to go on. It’s never easy when you lose a parent, but he was able to cope because of her.”

He dedicated the album 5 to Roker and the single “Thinking of You”

to her memory: “Are the colors deeper shades? / And tell me mama/ Are there great big brass parades? / Does the sun shine night and day? / Tell me mama no more sleeping? / Tell me mama no more weeping?”

Kravitz is strangely relaxed for someone with such a full plate. He’s sloped sideways on the couch explaining that he just came back from New Orleans to see his daughter perform last night. Before that he was touring with U2, performing for four dates on their 360° tour. He just signed on to play Cinna, the designer from the popular *Hunger Games* science fiction novels that have been made into a film slated for a March 2012 release. He also designs furniture and fixtures at Kravitz Design, his own interior design company.

The 47-year-old also foresees that maybe one day he won’t belong just to his fans or to his daughter, whom he calls his best friend, but maybe he’ll hook up with the right woman: “I am single and open *and* waiting,” he says with a hint of devilishness.

He’s just finished *Black and White America*, his magnum opus: a 16-track double album, two years in the making, which represents both his optimism and his uncertainty about the future of race relations in the U.S. A documentary he viewed on post-Obama racism left him skeptical about a panacea for discrimination. “Maybe we are beginning to move on, but there’s still a lot of people who want to hold on to their old ideas,” he says.

The album’s title track delves into some of the racism experienced by his parents: “In 1963 my father married: a black woman / And they walked the streets they were in danger: look what you done! / The future looks like it has come around / And maybe we have finally found our common ground.”

Yet there’s not necessarily a common theme for the project. It runs the gamut, from sensual reggae ditties like “Boongie Drop” (an ode to the full-figured woman, featuring Jay-Z) to the rock- and funk-infused “Rock Star City Life,” to tracks with disco beats and others reminiscent of heavy metal. This, his ninth studio offering, is fun and easygoing, a product of his time at his mother’s family’s homestead in the Bahamas, where he owns a bungalow, and Paris, where he spent considerable time

“I am single and open

as well. “All of my albums are all over the place musically. I have a difficult time making a record and staying on one path,” he says.

It’s a project painted in the bright colors of the Caribbean, of punk life, lessons learned, strolling the streets of Europe, soul, hip-hop, rock, cherished memories, and hope, all merged together like only he can. His enviable resolve and calm shapes his life as well as his music. “I just do what I feel, and it just comes out.”

Black and White America is slated for release on August 30.



and waiting.”

Top by **Obesity and Speed**, vest by **InAisce**, pants
and sunglasses, Lenny's own.