



## Andre Bell: Who He Is Inside

BY DAVID MORRISON

ADELIO TRINIDAD photo: [www.adeliotrinidad.com](http://www.adeliotrinidad.com)

“When I was 11 we visited my grandparents for Christmas. They had a piano and I was fascinated by it. The next year we moved into a house that had a piano in it and it was love at first touch, basically! I just sat down and played it and made up a song straight away; it just flowed naturally from me.”

And so it was that the young Andre Bell discovered the talent for which he may have been born hard-wired into. Twelve years and a whole lot of adventures later, he has made the career move to Toronto to take his first tentative steps into the pop world. With his natural musicianship, songwriting prowess, expressive voice and undeniably marketable Ashton Kutcher-esque looks, the smart money is on him making a breakthrough. Having spent time in conversation with Andre recently, I'd personally add charm, sincerity and a grounded appreciation of the work ahead to the looks and skill-set that should serve him well in the music business.

At just twenty-three years-old Andre has already lived an extraordinary life, with obvious focus on the eight years he spent traveling around the world on a sailboat with his parents and sister. I've always believed that the best education anyone can receive is through travel, a philosophy Andre

wholeheartedly supports from first-hand experience.

“It was a great opportunity to explore myself from a very young age,” he says. “My parents are very good at letting me do my own thing and have always trusted me, so I got to experience a lot of amazing things in a lot of different cultures. Some people say they've traveled a lot but never, you know, even gone to the market, met local people or had a bad experience – the ones you really learn and grow from! You do learn fast traveling, and all the time. I got to learn what I associate with the most, what I feel about things, what grounds me, so my dad (Bowser resident, Paul Bell) said that by the age of fourteen I knew exactly who I was.”

The family eventually left the high seas to settle back in Paul's native Britain for a while, before immigrating to Canada – Invermere, BC, to be exact – in 2000. Since they arrived Andre has been beavering away at his music by writing songs, performing occasional solo shows and working on finding his sound by drawing inspiration from his musical heroes. His influences are arguably more ‘mature’ than the average twenty-three year-old; the work of such as Elton John, Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen, Cat Stevens and comparable songwriting colossi is central to helping form the

unabashed pop music that Andre is creating. His 2009 debut EP, *Who I Am Inside*, bears such echoes across its seven songs, where dramatic ballads like *Falling* and *Perfect Tear* sit comfortably alongside the bouncy pop-rock of *Bright Eyes* or *Black and White*. It's a promising taster for what may follow on the debut full-length album – *Always Andre* – a work in progress as you read.

Of all Andre's influences, however, it is Canadian genius David Foster that has had the greatest impact on him – especially because of what unfolded when they had occasion to meet.

“He was playing at a government event for MLAs in Victoria, and I got to meet him,” Andre begins, full of excitement. “I had a song on a memory stick and gave it to him, thinking I'd done as much as I ever could have done, but about half way through his concert he stopped and said: ‘Is there anyone out there that thinks they have what it takes to be the next big star?’ Of course, I jumped up, and he got me on stage and asked what he could play for me – as he knows everything backwards – but I said I'd like to play a song for him! So I played *By the Sea* (from the EP) and was thinking, ‘This is just a dream – my lifelong hero listening to me play my song on his piano!’”

Picture the scene: It's December 2016 and Andre is looking forward to a quiet family Christmas after another hectic year in the world of pop. But he's also excited for January, when sessions for the 5th album will begin with his pal Dave Foster in the producer's chair again. People are already talking about the planned duet with Elton. A global smash, they say. But that's next year. Tonight, Bruce, Enya and Avril will be swiving by for a few hands of Canasta, so he'll have some fun and then pack for the Island in the morning.

Hey, anything's possible. Anything. Would Andre have ever dreamed he'd perform one of his own songs for one of the greatest record producers that ever lived? No, of course not – but it happened. And he made it happen, so bet against nothing when it comes to this young man. ~

For more information visit [www.andrell.ca](http://www.andrell.ca) and [www.myspace.com/andrellmusic](http://www.myspace.com/andrellmusic)

# Our local youth Out of the Nest

BY RITA LEVITZ

## LEANNE MEADS ON BEING A PARAMEDIC

Leanne Meads (Bowser Elementary School, Qualicum Beach Middle School, Kwalikum Secondary School '07) could hardly wait for her nineteenth birthday – it meant she could finally begin the career she had spent the previous year preparing for. “I took the Justice Institute Emergency Medical Response course while I was still in Grade 12, and I also volunteered for the Deep Bay Fire Department. I enjoyed the first responder part more than the fire part. It felt like what I should be doing.”



LEANNE MEADS • RITA LEVITZ PHOTO

After graduation, Leanne took the Primary Care Paramedic training in Victoria, but had to wait until February 2008, her nineteenth birthday, to get her Class 4 Drivers License and apply to BC Ambulance. “I kept calling to make sure they were processing it.” Her first posting was Tofino; she has been a paramedic at the Qualicum Bay Ambulance Station for a year.

“I like the fact that you don't do the same thing everyday. We can be called out for anything from a nosebleed that won't stop to a full cardiac arrest, and then, of course, there are the highway accidents.”

At twenty, Leanne has already witnessed more traumatic and stressful situations than most people experience in a lifetime. “It's a lot of weight on your shoulders, walking into someone's worst nightmare. People put all their trust in you to be calm and deal effectively with the situation. It took doing it to know I could handle it, that I didn't



**Specializing in  
Fine Cookware, Linens,  
Tableware & Home Decor**

UPSTAIRS INSIDE  
THESE STORES AT:




Quality Foods

- Qualicum Beach - 705 Memorial Ave.
- Comox - 2275 Guthrie Rd.
- Port Alberni - 2943 10th Ave.

[www.QualityFoods.com](http://www.QualityFoods.com)

panic, that I could be in control and be calm. Then you know you're in the right job.”

A 911 call from here is dispatched to Victoria, and categorized as Code Two – non life-threatening – or Code Three – lights and sirens. There are always two people on duty here, a ten-hour 8am – 6pm shift and a fourteen-hour 6pm – 8am shift.

“I put in 80-90 hour weeks, but it's considered part-time – no benefits, no overtime pay, no medical coverage. We go to the same houses, the same scenes as police and fire, but we're not treated the same. The people I know work here in spite of the working conditions and wages; we do it because we love it.”

“This job – the pressures, the responsibility and what you experience – changes your mind-set. I've grown up a lot faster because of it. I don't take things for granted. It doesn't have to be gory and gross, just really sad, and it makes you look at things differently. You have to be the right person for the job, so that you can maintain a positive attitude – experience it, deal with it and let it go.”

“This job makes me appreciate my family, my friends, everything. It makes me want to spend time with them. What if this person was my grandmother? I want to treat the people I attend the way I'd want them to treat me, or my family. You can maintain your compassion without becoming so emotionally involved that it destroys your ability to do your job.”

“You meet people in not ideal circumstances; you do all you can to make the situation better for them, and I like doing that. You have to do as much with your time as you can, and make a difference, because you never know...” ~