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## On the Road Again: Andrew W.K. and the Calder Quartet in Boston

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*(A to Z is on vacation this week. She managed to check out Andrew W.K. last night. Here's what happened...)*



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Throughout his concert with the [Calder Quartet](#), [Andrew W.K.](#) kept stressing that this tour was an "experiment." That his merging of classical piano, a string quartet and party-hearty anthems was something untested and unproved. But while a work-in-progress feel did permeate the first night of his tour at a movie-theater in Boston, the beauty of the music performed trumped any bumps.

W.K. said as much himself near the end of the show, talking about what powerful emotions music invokes in him. In recent years, this motivational-speaker stance has made him a self-help guru of sorts: Because of a bad contract - which bans him from releasing music under the Andrew W.K. name on CD in the States - he's been unable to properly release follow-ups to the LPs *I Get Wet* and *The Wolf*. (He's released several albums in Asia, however, along with some vinyl and a punk 7" stateside.)

And so he's been forced to become a positive figure spreading the gospel of fun -- and musically adventurous. His collaboration with the Calder Quartet - a NYC string quartet known for its genre-defying work - sprang from his recent album of piano music, *55 Cadillac*. In the spirit of this, W.K. sat

behind a piano for the entire show, and let the Quartet take most of the spotlight.

This made the show feel much more like a classical-music concert - even if the pieces performed could be unorthodox. Tristan Perich's "Interface" involved drones of four-channel, 1-bit music (think sub-Nintendo) laced through lasers of strings -- a clash of digital bleeps with creaks, saw noises and high-pitched whines that was hypnotic. Christine Southworth's "Honey Flyers" did conjure quivers of bees, but not in the traditional sense: The three-part composition somewhat resembled the buzzing hives, but flowered into something with almost traditional pop structure; it sounded like one of those Lullabye Versions of... albums. And Philip Glass' "Company" was even better, a beautiful piece underscoring Glass' trademark tranquility.

Throughout this, W.K. sat at the piano watching the quartet, and occasionally added in some color or batch of chords. W.K. the singer/rocker is a hurricane - but behind a piano and backed by an orchestra, he knows when to fade into the background. Still, that old W.K. spirit certainly emerged: When improvising, he pounded on the piano like a mad scientist, his long hair flying every which way, and at times he resembled a hammy Vaudeville performer, getting by on physical comedy.

But overall, the tone of the night was refined. Even string-driven renditions of his solo work seemed more subdued: "I Get Wet" was almost spoken-word, for starters, and even a string-decorated version of "Party Hard" was more the after-party instead of the main event (even though he persuaded the crowd to whip shirts/jackets over their heads like a giant windmill during the song). "We Want Fun," a brief snippet of "She is Beautiful" and "I Love New York City" (replaced, of course, by "I Love Boston, Mass." and driven by audience handclaps after a drum-machine failure due to monitor issues) further pleased the audience.

Of course, W.K.'s fans - including two perhaps beer-fueled frat boys and two skinny, adoring MIT students who rushed the stage - ate up the more familiar stuff. But they were respectful to the quieter moments and rapturous only when appropriate. And the diversity - from grandmothers to punks, a kid wearing a stuffed-wolf hat (seriously) to couples there on a lark - was telling. Not just a novelty act, W.K.'s message about the power of music appears to be taking over the world. And it's a good thing.

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