

# Avril Lavigne



*September 27, 1984 • Belleville, Ontario,  
Canada*

Singer, songwriter

In 2002 an eighteen-year-old Canadian newcomer named Avril Lavigne swept on to the U.S. music scene with her debut disc, *Let Go*. By the end of the year, three singles from the album, including “Complicated,” broke into the top ten of the Billboard charts, and *Let Go* was the second best-selling CD of the year. Lavigne’s music scored high with fans and critics, but so did her personal style, which consisted of wearing loose pants, tank tops, and neckties. As a result, she sparked a fashion trend and was heralded in the press as a “skater-punk,” an alternative to pop princesses, like Britney Spears (1981–), whose look and videos had started to become increasingly more provocative. In May 2004 Lavigne released her second album, *Under My Skin*, which debuted at number one not only in the United States, but also in many other countries, including Germany, Spain, and Japan. By the end of 2005 Avrilmania was showing no signs of

slowing—Lavigne was performing to sold-out crowds on an extended concert tour and in April she took home top honors at the Juno Awards, which are considered to be the Canadian equivalent of the U.S. Grammy Awards.

### Not a girlie-girl

Avril Ramona Lavigne was born on September 27, 1984, in Belleville, a small city in the eastern part of the province of Ontario, Canada. The second of three children, her father, John, was a technician for Bell Canada; mother Judy was a

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“Why should I care what other people think of me? I am who I am. And who I wanna be.”

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stay-at-home mom. When Lavigne was five, the family moved to Napanee, a farming town even smaller than Belleville with a total population of only five thousand. From the time she was a toddler Lavigne idolized her older brother, Matt, and insisted on trying to do anything he could do. As she explained to Chris Willman of *Entertainment Weekly*, “If he played hockey, I had to play hockey. He played baseball, I wanted to.” In fact, when Lavigne was ten she played in the Napanee boy’s hockey league; she also became known as quite a baseball pitcher.

As she grew older Lavigne gained a reputation as a tomboy who preferred family outings like dirt biking or camping over dating. And in the tenth grade she discovered skateboarding, which became a particular passion. “I’m just not a girlie-girl,” Lavigne laughingly told Willman. When not playing sports, however, she did pursue another interest—singing. The Lavignes were devout Christians and attended Evangel Temple in Napanee, where young Avril sang in the choir beginning at age ten. Soon she branched out and began singing at all types of venues, including county fairs, hockey games, and company parties. She primarily sang covers of songs made popular by

country singers Martina McBride (1966–) and Faith Hill (1967–). Lavigne’s parents bought her a sound machine to sing along with, and she practiced in front of a mirror at home for hours.

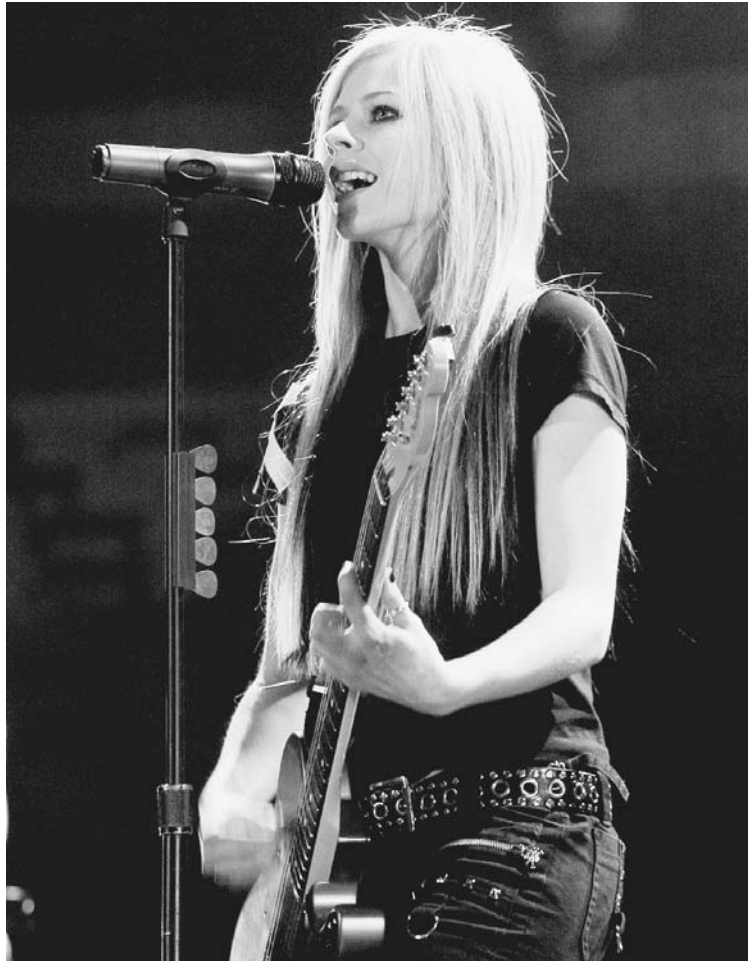
In 1998, when she was fourteen years old, Lavigne’s first manager, Cliff Fabri, discovered her singing at a small performance in a local bookstore. When talking to Willman, Fabri described the young girl as a “frizzy-haired waif.” But he liked Lavigne’s voice, and he was especially impressed by her confident attitude. That same year, such confidence helped her win a contest to sing a duet with fellow Canadian Shania Twain (1965–) at the jam-packed Corel Centre in Ottawa. Even though it was her first time performing in front of twenty thousand people, Lavigne was fearless. As she told Willman, “I thought, ‘This is what I’m going to do with my life.’”

## Lavigne lets go

Two years later, when she was sixteen, Fabri arranged for Lavigne to audition for L.A. Reid, head of Arista Records in New York City. After a fifteen-minute tryout Reid signed Lavigne to an amazing two-record, \$1.25 million contract. The sixteen year old immediately dropped out of high school to devote herself to working on her first album. At first producers offered Lavigne new country tunes to sing, but after six months the team was unable to write any actual songs, and it became apparent that things were not clicking. Reid then sent the singer to Los Angeles to work with a team of producers and writers known as The Matrix. When Lavigne arrived in L.A. Matrix producer Lauren Christy asked Lavigne what style she had in mind. As Christy relayed to Chris Willman, Lavigne had responded, “I’m 16. I want to rock out.” That same day Lavigne and Matrix writers penned the first song for her album, “Complicated.”

Lavigne’s debut album, *Let Go*, was released on June 4, 2002, and within six weeks it had gone platinum, meaning over a million copies were sold. The single “Complicated,” which received a great deal of radio airplay, reached number one on the adult Billboard charts; “I’m With You” also reached number one on the adult charts; and the catchy pop tune “Sk8er Boi” was

*With edgy lyrics and a strong voice, Avril Lavigne has become one of America's top-selling entertainers. AP/Wide World Photos.*



a top-requested video on MTV and made it in the top ten of the Billboard Hot 100.

To promote the album Lavigne set out on a whirlwind publicity tour, making appearances on talk shows such as *Late Night with David Letterman*, and giving a series of concerts in Europe with her newly formed band, which was put together by her new management firm, Nettwerk. Most inexperienced singers are backed by seasoned musicians, but Nettwerk chose to go with young performers who were up and coming in the Canadian punk-rock scene. As Nettwerk manager Shauna Gold told

Shanda Deziel of *Maclean's*, “[Lavigne] is young, her music’s young, we needed a band that would fit well with who she is as a person.”

And, after being away from her small-town home in Canada, Lavigne was beginning to form her own personal style. Initially publicists tried to market her like other teen pop stars, but Lavigne rebelled. “If I was made up by the record label,” she remarked to Lorraine Ali of *Newsweek*, “I’d have bleached-blond hair and I’d probably be wearing a bra for a shirt.” Instead, the singer-songwriter opted for a skater-punk look, which consisted of cut-off plaid pants, steel-toed Doc Martens, and tank tops worn with neckties. According to Ali, the five-foot-one tomboy “spawned a prepubescent army of Lavignettes” who snatched up her records and faithfully copied her outfits.

### Finds independence with *Under My Skin*

By the end of 2002 *Let Go* had sold 4.9 million copies and was the second best-seller of the year just behind *The Eminem Show*. (By 2005 worldwide sales topped over fourteen million.) As 2003 progressed Lavigne continued to gather more fame and more accolades. She performed to sold-out crowds at her first North American concert tour; nabbed five Grammy nominations, including Song of the Year for “I’m With You”; and was named Best New Artist at the MTV Video Music Awards. In Canada Lavigne received six Juno nominations, winning four, including Best New Artist and Best Pop Album.

In the press Lavigne was deemed the leader of the pack of a new group of edgy, female singer-songwriters, which included Pink (1979–) and Michelle Branch (1983–). She also endured being called the “anti-Britney,” referring to Britney Spears. In interviews Lavigne expressed her distaste for the label. “I don’t like that term,” she told Chris Willman. “It’s stupid. She’s a human being. God, leave her alone.” But, in the same interview radio programmer Tom Poleman explained to Willman that Lavigne’s popularity was partly thanks to her “anti-Britney” style. “Avril is much more the regular kid,” Poleman commented.