

# HUSTLE AND HEART



# AN INTERVIEW WITH



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**Platinum–selling global artist Ava Max has cemented her iconic status with the success of the sensational hit “Sweet but Psycho” and the recent international chart-topping single “Kings & Queens”. A woman who has created a flourishing reality of manifested dreams and heartfelt melodies, Max is the embodiment of courage, self-expression, and unapologetic pop. Her riveting sound and empoweringly relatable anthems have served as a catalyst to her stardom and has enabled her to become a total breakthrough queen in the industry. We spoke to the singer–songwriter about female empowerment, manifesting our desires, and the highly–anticipated album *Heaven & Hell*.**

**BASIC:** Who is Ava Max at her very core? What do you stand for and what does your music represent?

**AVA MAX:** Ava Max doesn’t take herself seriously. She is silly and goofy, but she also knows what she wants and she stands up for what’s right. My music represents inspiration from female empowerment and equality. It’s about just doing you and not following other people.

**BASIC:** You mentioned that at a very young age you watched your parents really struggle in America. Can you dig deeper and share more with us on this subject? How did they struggle and in what ways did that impact you and your life growing up?

**AVA MAX:** They came to the states as Albanian immigrants and they both had three jobs each. I didn’t see them very much until I was about 10 years old and they didn’t speak a lick of English. They really taught me to work 24/7 in order to get what you want because it was the only way you could get what you wanted here.

**BASIC:** Moving around often as a child made you feel like an outsider. When did you finally find your footing and feel more grounded in the world?

**AVA MAX:** You will always be an outsider to the unknown and I think once I learned that, I felt better about myself. Growing up, yes, I did feel like an outsider because I grew up in different states. I went to different public schools, home schooled for a while, and even went to a private school for a year. I bounced around often and I was bullied a lot. I realized as I got older that in the moment, it is sad, but we are always going to be outsiders because none of us are identical. We just have to learn to adapt no matter where we go or what we do in life.

**BASIC:** Do you remember any significant life events that may have played a role in your creative development as a singer and songwriter?

**AVA MAX:** Being told no. I think if I was told yes more when I grew up or my parents always told me I was great, I don’t think I would have become who I am. Yes, my parents were supportive, but if they sugar-coated everything I wouldn’t be the person I am now. They always keep me grounded and I have a really great friend and family circle. I just think I would have been a very different person if I wasn’t told no so many times. When I first performed on stage when I was about eight or nine years old—a talent show sort of thing—I instantly knew it was what I wanted to do. It was so weird because I was so young. It’s a blessing and a curse, you know? Knowing what you want to do at such a young age. But performing really made me want to become a singer.

**BASIC:** Tell us about one of your first introductions to the music and entertainment industry. What was the experience like and what feelings did it provoke within you?

**AVA MAX:** My first introduction to the music and entertainment industry was when I moved to California with my family when I was about 14 years old. I had been doing singing competitions for about four years before moving to California from Virginia and I just really loved to

sing. My whole family was on board to support me. I was the type of kid who was always super passionate and my parents saw that and ended up moving across the country with me. We got to Los Angeles and no one wanted to sign a 14-year-old singer, so after a year of struggling to meet and work with people in LA, we moved back east and eventually, we ended up in South Carolina. In South Carolina I was in my teen years and I started writing a lot of songs. When I turned 17, I moved back to California.

**BASIC:** You released your highly-anticipated album *Heaven & Hell* just last week, an album that calls attention to the dualities of darkness and light. Can you talk to us about what this album means to you and the true meaning behind it?

**AVA MAX:** *Heaven & Hell* is about the concept of life. A lot of people ask me if it’s about religion, but it’s not. It’s more-so about what we go through in our relationships and our careers. For me personally, I feel like I just went through Heaven and Hell in my life over the last three days with the passing of my grandfather just two days ago. That was really difficult and it’s kind of crazy because I talk about the roller coaster of life and it literally just happened to me. It’s hard. You have to keep a smile on your face, but you’re dealing with sadness and I feel like we are all dealing with Heaven and Hell. This is the first time I talk about my grandfather actually.

**BASIC:** I am so sorry for your loss. Would you like to talk about your grandfather—perhaps any exceptional moments you may have shared together or something he had taught you?

**AVA MAX:** Yes, I would love to. He was actually an actor and comedian back in Albania where he was in films. I posted a snidbit of him in a black and white movie last night. I really got my love for the stage from my grandfather.

**BASIC:** Every song has a story to tell, an underlining message or meaning. Talk to us about your creative process, more specifically in terms of the beloved track “Kings & Queens” which spent five weeks at #1 on European airplay.

**AVA MAX:** “Kings & Queens” is all about equality and female empowerment. It is about wanting women to be equal with men and

queens supporting other queens, girls supporting other girls. I think this is super important to talk about, especially in a world that is very male-dominated. Almost every single song on my album is about female empowerment and I feel very strongly about it because I grew up being told no by a lot of men in the industry.

**BASIC:** There is great deal of gaslighting and a lack of representation when it comes to women, especially within the entertainment industry. As an advocate for women supporting women and promoting inner strength and confidence, what does girl power mean to you and what actions you have taken to support the women in your life?

**AVA MAX:** Girl power to me is all about supporting other female artists, women in your life—whether in your family or friends group. It’s about the way you want to support others. For me, I write about it and I talk about what I went through and I feel like my writing is the best way in which I can relay that. A lot of people ask me why so many of my songs are about female empowerment and it’s because until we are equal, that is what my songs will be about.

**BASIC:** What people and/or things have served as your greatest influences in life in terms of both your personal and creative lives?

**AVA MAX:** My mom for sure. She sang growing up so I sang with her around the house a lot. She always sang with me and got me loving music—my whole family really. When I met my producer Cirkut, he let me write pretty much whatever I wanted to write about. He is a genius in his own right and I learned a lot from him.

**BASIC:** Manifestation and actualizing your dreams is a really dominant part of your life and overall being. That said, each individual who has incorporated this kind of spirituality into their lifestyle has their own unique process. What is your manifestation process like?

**AVA MAX:** I have actually never answered this before and I’m really excited. I feel like manifestation is somewhat the same, but also a little different for everyone. For me, I think it’s about really knowing what you want and working on it every single day. If we just think about something, it’s probably not going to happen. We have to visualize what we want in our future and work on it constantly. I truly believe the Universe can feel when you’re not working and in turn, won’t give you what you want. In a way, while you are working, manifestation gets brought upon you without you even really knowing.

**BASIC:** I am a very spiritual individual and manifestation is a very large part of my daily rituals and routine so I was really looking forward to exchanging thoughts with you about this subject.

**AVA MAX:** Wait, I really want to know how you manifest!

**BASIC:** Certainly. I am a very visual person so I am always creating wild vision boards and I meditate every morning—both a vocal and silent mediation. When I do the vocal mediation, I sort of speak out loud and ask for guidance and clarity on different areas of my life and then I will sit quietly with my heart open and just listen.





**AVA MAX:** Wow, I love that. I really love that. It’s so funny that you mention a vision board because I am about to post a throwback vision board I found in my mother’s basement that I made over 10 years ago. It’s all wrinkly, but it’s crazy because I actually accomplished all of the things on the board. It’s such a powerful thing. You literally visualize it.

**BASIC:** You are known for self-expression and empowerment, two traits that can be a challenge for individuals to embrace and adopt into their lives. Having spoken openly about your personal experiences with bullying and learning to speak up, what words of advice can you provide to our youth that might help to inspire their confidence and learn to be proud of who they are?

**AVA MAX:** Surrounding yourself with people who love you for you is really important. Let’s say worst case scenario, if you don’t have anyone to turn to, I think the best way is to turn your anger, frustration, or sadness into a means of expression like writing in a journal. If you don’t get it out, you won’t be able to feel better. Once I started song writing I felt better because I had an outlet.

**BASIC:** Was there a particular moment or experience when you were being bullied that made you stand your ground and speak up?

**AVA MAX:** I was always the type to stand up for myself which is why I always got bullied so much. I did not care about what the rumors were in school or who was bullying me, I always stood up for myself. It’s why I got kicked out in the sixth grade and then in seventh grade, I went to a private Christian school, but then I left that school because I felt like I couldn’t follow any of the rules. I was a rule breaker!

**BASIC:** You have defined a very bold and eccentric style that quite frankly, we’re obsessed with. How would you define your personal style and who are some of your favorite designers right now?

**AVA MAX:** Oh, some of my favorite designers? This is good. I really like By FAR, a new fashion brand that has purses and shoes. I also really love Marine Serre who does a lot of futuristic clothing. I am really into Marine Serre, but if I had to pick a favorite, it would obviously be Chanel.

**BASIC:** What is on the horizon for Ava Max?

**AVA MAX:** I am really excited to do this virtual performance with Amazon Music that previewed yesterday. I am going to slowly keep posting that on my Instagram if anyone else hasn’t seen it. I have been real trying to do more virtual performances. I got invited to *America’s Got Talent* tonight for the finale with the contestants which is really awesome. I am trying to perform as much as possible virtually, up until I can actually do a tour. That will probably be in about seven or eight months, hopefully. If not, I think all artists are probably going to lose their minds.

**BASIC:** With quarantine and the implications of Covid, artists are acclimating to the change by embracing these virtual performances. I can’t imagine what it’s like to stand on stage and give it your all without an actual audience before you. Can you describe what this feels like?

**AVA MAX:** It is super weird! But I guess it’s also kind of like shooting a music video.

**FAVORITE THING IN YOUR WARDROBE?**  
MY PUFFY JACKETS.

**FAVORITE COMFORT FOOD?** MACARONI AND CHEESE.

**FAVORITE THING TO DO WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING?**  
EAT MACARONI AND CHEESE.

**FAVORITE LIFE MOTTO?**  
STAND UP FOR YOURSELF.

**FAVORITE SONG ON YOUR SPOTIFY RIGHT NOW?** “DIAMONDS” BY SAM SMITH.

**FAVORITE PIECE OF ADVICE YOU HAVE EVER BEEN GIVEN?**  
WORK NOW, PLAY LATER.