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## CD review: 'Grandfather's Hat,' Jeff Daniels

Jeff Daniels finds a great fit with his new 'Grandfather's Hat' CD

By Chris Rietz | **For the Lansing State Journal**

It all started a couple of years ago when Michigan's own Jeff Daniels - yep, the actor - did two evenings of his own songs to benefit his beloved Purple Rose Theatre in Chelsea, then released the best stuff on CD, the delightful "Live and Unplugged."

But what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the Michigander, and his new "Grandfather's Hat," a far more ambitious project than the first, suggests Daniels may be in the full bloom of an honest-to-gosh second career.

Released under the aegis of Lansing's own Harvest Productions, "Hat" is again mostly a live album, recorded (except for one track from NYC's fabled Birdland) at an array of Michigan venues, including the Wharton Center, the Creole Gallery and the Purple Rose.

Though it's being billed as more introspective, what's really evident in "Hat" is the focus on songwriting: whereas "Live" was certainly entertaining throughout, the songs on "Hat" have more heft, and variety. And if you're afraid Daniels is the latest victim of Leonard-Nimoy-as-Lounge-Singer Syndrome, forget it - as well as he sang on the first album, he's clearly found his zone here.

The irrepressible humor is still there; but "Are You As Excited About Me As I Am?," a song about fame and its tendency to fade after 15 minutes, is as good as any ever written on the subject:

"All I am is all I'm not, and all I had is all I've got."

There's a revised (!) version of "Lifelong Tiger Fan Blues," and Bob Seger saxman Alto Reed lights up "Detroit Train." "Escanaba in da Moonlight" gets another nod in "The Ballad of the Buckless Yooper," with local hotshots Steppin' In It accompanying him.

But Daniels really seems to find his voice in the ballads, especially the simple, poignant "Middle of the Night" - his clear, pitch-perfect reading suggests he's more than a "nice" singer, but a formidable one.

No, Jeff Daniels won't quit his day job; it pays too well. But to listeners who suspect that his



### Listen up

- "Grandfather's Hat," Jeff Daniels
- Boomadeboom Records, \$15

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celebrity has subsidized a career as a singer/songwriter that he doesn't deserve, try this: listen to "Grandfather's Hat" while pretending you've never heard of the guy before. Pretty nice stuff, isn't it?

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