

DETROIT DISC: Daniels acts like a real musician

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On his debut CD, "Live and Unplugged," Jeff Daniels sings about being "Hollywood's answer to a Renaissance man." Daniels exaggerates - he's comparing his musical gifts to William Shatner's -- but not by much. Actor, playwright, filmmaker and theater founder, Daniels reveals to the public at large what audiences at his annual concerts at Chelsea's Purple Rose Theatre already knew: The man can sing, the man can play the guitar, the man can write a song.

Bob Dylan may not have to worry, but Shatner definitely does.

A deft fingerpicker, Daniels has a particular affinity for the blues, an idiom usually associated with hard living, he says, whereas his life is anything but: "What do I have to be depressed about?" Well, for one thing, the years of rooting for Detroit's baseball team, a fate he bemoans in "The Lifelong Tiger Fan Blues."

Daniels tends to sing about what he knows and imagines the rest. Some of his singular experiences also happen to be universal: driving his first car ("Blue Valiant"), parental devotion ("Momma Never Left Her Oldest Boy Alone"), a date that blossomed into something permanent ("Kathy").

Even better are songs about things Daniels' listeners will never experience. In "The Dirty Harry Blues," he commemorates being killed on-screen by Clint Eastwood ("Make my day, blow me away, got them Dirty Harry blues"). In "Recreational Vehicle," Daniels, playing guitar all the while, tells the true tale of a family vacation that goes from good to bad and ugly when he forgets his wife at a truck stop. Yes, the same woman he sings of so worshipfully in "Kathy."

Performing before a live audience, Daniels radiates self-effacing warmth and a sparkling sense of humor. If acting doesn't work out, he just may have something to fall back on.

By Martin F. Kohn, Free Press staff writer

(Proceeds from the CD benefit the Purple Rose Theatre, where Daniels will perform in concert Dec. 28-Jan. 8. For details, go to www.purplerosetheatre.org)

Jeff Daniels

Chelsea actor,
playwright and
musician

"Live and Unplugged"

Self-released,
available at
www.jeffdaniels.com

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