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Daniels' music sincerely humorous

Sunday, November 21, 2004

Jeff Daniels is well aware of how the public perceives actors crossing over to the singer-songwriter realm. He knows Russell Crowe and Billy Bob Thornton have terrific careers in front of the camera, but have had questionable results behind a microphone.

And that's why he deflates his own ego with the first song on his new "Live and Unplugged" CD: "If William Shatner Can, I Can Too."

"I put that disclaimer up front," a smiling Daniels said, visiting Grand Rapids last week to promote the CD. "There are enough actor/singer/songwriters out there trying to revisit Bob Dylan."

"Live and Unplugged" includes a dozen tunes Daniels performed at the Purple Rose Theatre, which he founded in Chelsea, the small town outside Ann Arbor where he lives. For the past three years, he has presented solo concerts during the weeks after Christmas and New Year's to benefit the nonprofit theater. Now he's tying in the fundraising with the release of the CD, available at www.jeffdaniels.com.

"The fundraising never goes away in the nonprofit world," he said.

Daniels is best known for his roles in Hollywood hits "Dumb and Dumber" and "Terms of Endearment," as well as Michigan favorite "Escanaba in da Moonlight." He will be seen next in the made-for-TV movie "The Five People You Meet in Heaven," which airs Dec. 5 on ABC, and the film "Because of Winn-Dixie," which will be in theaters in February.

His songs, not surprisingly, mirror the diversity of his acting. Tracks such as "Kathy" and "If You're Comin'" offer honest insight, while "The Lifelong Tiger Fan Blues," "The Dirty Harry Blues" and "If I Weren't So Stupid, You Wouldn't

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be so Smart" offer humorous observations.

"My songwriting and playwriting are similar," he said. "It can be sincere, and it can be outrageous. I enjoy the challenge of going back and forth."

VanderArk hitched

The Press received an e-mail last week from local singer/songwriter Brian VanderArk, who dropped the news he recently got hitched. Her name is Lux Land, an alt-country singer/songwriter and aspiring author from San Francisco.

"I was playing in Park City, Utah, and when I finished, Lux came up to me and said that she missed my set, but she caught the last song and liked it ('The Freshmen')." VanderArk said in a second e-mail.

She passed along her Web site address on a napkin. "We barely spoke. I left, checked out her site later, e-mailed her, and we started chatting. Next thing you know, I'm completely knocked out by this girl and invite her to Michigan, take her out on the Grand Haven pier and ask her to marry me. We married five weeks later."

The couple eloped Oct. 26 in Santa Fe, N.M. And where will they live?

"I've convinced her to live in Grand Rapids with me, under the guise that it doesn't get much colder than 45 degrees," he wrote.

VanderArk is excited to let the world know about his marriage. "I couldn't be prouder," he said.

As for his music career, VanderArk's current single is "And Then You Went Away" from his "Resurrection" CD. He performs as part of a Toys For Tots benefit Dec. 15 at Billy's, 1437 Wealthy St. SE. His Web site: www.bvamus.com. Her Web site: luxlandmusic.com.

Songwriter turns to painting

Fans of veteran West Michigan songwriter Lucy Webster haven't seen much of the singer on stage the past year. For good reason: The musician has turned to painting as her creative outlet and has opened a gallery in her Walker home.

"It's so much fun," Webster said. "It's a whole new thing. I just plain love creating."

Webster, who uses the name Lateeda for her artwork, writes and paints "in all genres." She began painting in earnest about a year ago after her husband and sound man, John, hurt his back and no longer could travel to gigs.

Webster exhibited her art at a Saugatuck gallery, then held a successful open house that covered "a couple of months' house payments." That cemented it. She even sold a painting to a North Carolina singer who plans to use it on the cover of his new CD.

Webster, 50, who became a grandmother a year ago, said painting lets her spend more time at home with her family. At her Breeze Way Gallery, 4337 Fennessy St. SW, "I'll put a pot of tea or coffee on and you can just sit and look at the art."

Art lovers can e-mail her for more information at lucy@lucywebster.com. Webster hasn't abandoned her guitar altogether. She plays "one last gig" at the Grand Rapids Art Museum on Dec. 17 with bandmates Jimmie Stagger, John Barbush and Charlie Hoats.

Star-studded two-step

If "Guiding Light" star Kim Zimmer was the belle of the Grand Rapids Police Officers' ball Saturday night, it's because she's had a bit of practice on the dance floor.

"I've had three weddings on 'Guiding Light,' " she quipped. "My parents met at a dance hall in Ohio, so I grew up dancing swing and foxtrot with my dad."

Zimmer said the ball was a chance to reconnect with high school buddies from Forest Hills Central High School class of 1973.

But it was a brief visit. Thursday she will help host the CBS telecast of Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York. You can catch her about 10:20 a.m. Zimmer said her parents, Jack and DeDe Zimmer, will be feasting with her family in New Jersey.

- Compiled by Press reporters John Serba, John Sinkevics, Sue Merrell, Jeffrey Kaczmarczyk and John D. Gonzalez

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