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Jeff Daniels

Michigan's best-known actor sings on CD for charity

Matthew Miller | NOISE

Jeff Daniels is likely the most famous actor in Michigan. And, now, he's the most famous actor in Michigan with a singing career. Not to worry, he hasn't gone all William Shatner on us. The CD he's just released, *Jeff Daniels Live and Unplugged*, is a charitable undertaking. All proceeds will go to the Purple Rose Theater in Chelsea, which Daniels founded in 1990. All the songs but one are Daniels originals, tunes alternately goofy and touching. NOISE talked with Daniels about fudge, getting killed on camera and why he's still committed to arts in the mitten state.

Q. To what degree was this project inspired by the work of William Shatner?

A. It was probably undertaken despite the work of William Shatner. The last thing the world needs is another actor turned singer-songwriter. I've been doing this since the early '70s, playing guitar and writing songs. I just never did them for anybody. It was more of a diary.

Four years ago, in a desperate attempt to raise money, the guys at the theater knew I did it, and basically they pushed me out on stage and said, "Let's see if anybody will pay to see a train wreck." The first year kind of was, but the second year got better and the third year I knew what I was doing. It's worked.

Q. You've got a song about being killed by Clint Eastwood. Any other big stars you'd like to be killed by?

A. No, Clint's the top. You take your awards where you can get them, those of us who have not been nominated, and getting shot by Clint Eastwood is definitely a notch in an actor's belt. It really was. I'm sitting there on a boat in San Pedro Bay in California at 2 a.m. in this movie "Blood Work," and Clint's standing over me with a 9 mm going "I never liked you, buddy." It's like sex. You're going, "Do me, Clint, do me." And, sure enough, kaboom.

Q. Can you talk about your continued commitment to the Michigan arts scene?

A. I'm just real proud to be from this state. We just came out of a rehearsal now, where these are all Michigan theater people. I've just always believed there's a talent pool here. It's just not as large as New York, L.A. or Chicago, but it exists and the people are just as talented. Even when I was in New York for 10 years, I told friends of mine, "I'm going to move back to Michigan," and one friend said, "You've never left." I would look around the waiting rooms in New York and L.A., and the people weren't from New York and L.A. They were from Detroit and Des Moines and Chicago and Dallas. That just told me that, as it relates to theater, the new American play isn't to be found in New York, it's west of the Hudson.

Q. A question spawned by your song "State Trooper": what's a "fudge sucker," exactly?

A. A fudge sucker is anyone who lives south of the Mackinac Bridge. They're the people from downstate who drive Up North and think Up North is going to Mackinac Island to eat fudge. The Yoopers know that going Up North doesn't mean Mackinac Island and fudge. I don't think there's any fudge whatsoever eaten north or west of St. Ignace.

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- Jeff Daniels CD signings
- Tuesday, Nov. 16
- Noon to 1:30 p.m., Schuler Books, Eastwood Towne Center, Lansing
- 7 to 8:30 p.m., Barnes & Noble, 333 E Grand River Ave., East Lansing.
- For information go to www.jeffdaniels.com




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