



A Friends of The Duck *Exclusive*

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5 Minutes with... Danny “B”

*Appearing at The Duck Blues Matinee
on Saturday, January 9, 2010*



Friends of the Duck: It seems like the blues is also a home for many actors. I'm thinking of Jim Byrnes, Dan Aykroyd and Raoul Bhaneja to name a few. Do you think of yourself as a musician or an actor?

Danny “B”:

I think of myself as an entertainer but if I had to give a specific answer it would be musician, because that’s where my heart and soul is. Acting is more of the other thing I do.

FoD: How do you slip into the persona of Danny “B” the bluesman?

DB:

That’s not a slipping into. Danny “B” the bluesman, that’s the real me. I live, eat, and sleep the blues. I can slip into Danny ‘B’ the rocker or country cat and act that out, but you can’t act out the blues. When I was invited to play the part of a club owner in the movie ‘Hank and Mike,’ they wanted me to play myself. They said we want you to play Danny “B”. I thought, well, this is kinda cool. I just gotta be myself. So there was some dialogue I had to speak and I said to the director, Danny “B” would never say this in a million years. He told me, no problem, Danny, rewrite the dialogue into your own words.

FoD: I hope they paid you extra money for that.

DB: I wish. All kidding aside, I had a lot of fun doing that movie. Joe Mantegna is one of my favourite actors, and to work with him was great experience. We had a blast.

FoD: You had your own band at the age of nine. What kind of music did you guys play?

DB: It was noise mostly. We were just three kids going through the motions, two guitar players and me on drums. But I knew right away that music was something I wanted to get into. I was even writing some songs back then.

FoD: When did you make the switch from the guy in the back to the guy up front?

DB: When I realized I would never be able to play the drums like Whitey Glenn. I was about fifteen or sixteen. Being the frontman turned out to be the right decision obviously, because I've been doing it ever since.

FoD: So how did you progress from there into the blues?

DB: I always liked rhythm and blues and that's the kind of music I played with my earliest school bands, so it was a natural progression to the blues. When I was seventeen, I hitchhiked out west from Toronto with two harmonicas in my backpack and ended up on the west coast of Vancouver Island in a place called Wreck Bay. That's the first place I ever saw whales and sea lions, very inspirational creatures. I would constantly play my harmonica for them to the rhythm of the waves coming in from the Pacific Ocean, and that's where I found my groove. I have a lot to thank to the Pacific and the whales for waking up the bluesman in me. People on the beach, where I was living, used to applaud me and encourage me. So I thought, maybe it's time I head back home and start playing for paying customers and that's how I got into the Toronto blues circuit. It became my life.

FoD: Would you agree that the blues is kind of like a 'calling'? Like the priesthood, for example?

DB: Absolutely. I couldn't put it better myself. You have to wholeheartedly believe in what you're doing, be yourself. It's something you're born to do. You're spreading the gospel of life through your music and nothing digs deeper than the blues. Although I do a lot of different types of songs at my gigs, whatever I sing comes out sounding like the blues. I could sing you a nursery rhyme, trying to sing it the way it was written, but it would come out as a bluesy nursery rhyme.

FoD: Who are your blues influences?

DB: Big Joe Turner, Louis Jordan, Louis Armstrong, Ray Charles and believe it or not, Frank Sinatra, the last guy people would think of as a blues singer. He did an album called 'Frank Sinatra Sings for Only Love Only.' If you really want to hear blues in a voice that was it and it was an album that helped me put my thing together. From the more recent era, there's Paul Butterfield and John Mayall.

FoD: Your most recent album is a tribute to Martin Luther King. What inspired you, as a white man, to do that?

DB: Actually, it's not an album, Wil. It's just a single. My most recent album was 'You Can't Make Peace.' It was released in '07.

FoD: Thanks for setting me straight on that, Danny. I guess I better notch up my research a bit. Let's get back to Martin Luther King, shall we.

DB: Of all the tragic events that have occurred during my lifetime the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. affected me the most. Although I was only a teenager at the time, I was devastated. He was one of my heroes and his 'I Have A Dream' speech inspires me to this day. I was watching 'The Hour' on CBC with George Stroumboulopoulos and one of his guests was the Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, Andrew Young [a member of the original Martin Luther King crew]. George asked him his take on the Obama election results. Mr Young answered 'the people have spoken, they chose grace over greed, faith over fear and vision over violence'. I immediately wrote those words down. A week or so later, I decided to write a song featuring those words of inspiration. I have written and recorded many songs in my life, but this is the one I am most proud of.

FoD: When you're at home and you want to kick back, what do you put on your record player?

DB: To tell you the truth, when I'm at home I kick back by watching television. I hardly ever listen to music in my home. If I have to learn a song, I'll listen to it a million times but otherwise you don't hear much music coming out of my speakers. When I'm on the road, however, that's when I like to listen to music. I always make sure I have my favourite CDs to listen to, and those are as eclectic as anything, although the blues are a big part of it. I love the 'Muddy Waters Woodstock Album.' I love Howlin' Wolf's 'London Sessions.' I never go on the road without Paul Simon's 'Graceland' album. It's a good luck charm for me. It's usually the first CD I pop into my player when I hit the road. Call me superstitious but the one time I didn't bring the CD along my brakes went on my car going down a hill. I also listen to The Beatles, Cat Stevens, Frank Sinatra, Big Joe Turner and the other people who influenced me as a musician.

FoD: The last word is yours, Danny.

DB: This is for the younger people. Go out and see a band. Go and listen to a band and watch the way people react to live music and you'll probably react the same way. I think you'll find your foot tapping without you even knowing it, and you'll feel your heart beating in a musical way. And, hey, maybe a good place to start would be at The Duck this Saturday afternoon. I hear they got a great houseband and a pretty good guest comin' down from Toronto.