



A Friends of The Duck *Exclusive*

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5 Minutes with... David Gogo

*Appearing at The Duck Blues Matinee
on Saturday, January 16, 2010*



Friends of The Duck: According to your bio you live in the Nanaimo, BC area. Are you originally from the east, like so many people living in BC, or a homegrown western boy?

David Gogo: I was born and raised on Vancouver Island and I would never leave it to move anywhere else. I live on the Gogo family compound, which my family has occupied since 1897.

FoD: When did you start playing?

DG: I've always had a guitar. I can't remember a time when I didn't either have a toy guitar that I was hacking away at, or a real one that I was serious about learning how to play. By the time I was fourteen, I was playing dances that my buddies, who were a couple of years older than me, and I were putting on. I was playing the bar scene with them when I was around sixteen.

FoD: What kind of music were you playing then?

DG: Quite a bit of '60s stuff by bands like Cream, The Kinks, The Who and The Stones, which were all very blues based. At the same time I discovered John Mayhall and the Bluesbreakers. As I listened to early records by The Rolling Stones, Cream, etc., I was quite interested in the song writing credits and wondered 'who is McKinley Morganfield

[Muddy Waters]...who is Skip James? Who are these people? So that's how I discovered the great bluesmen that paved the way for generations of other musicians, black and white.

FoD: Do you come from a musical family?

DG: I do, but not my immediate family. Some of my cousins are musicians. My cousin Paul [Gogo] has been playing keyboards with Trooper for about fifteen years, and my cousin John [Gogo], who's into alternative country music, has three records out. My dad's a huge music lover so there were always a lot of good tunes being played at our house. Anything from CCR and Canned Heat to BB King and Taj Mahal. So there was some blues there already for me to get hooked on.

FoD: Did you always want to be blues artist as opposed to rock?

DG: I think so, yeah. When I first started playing bars in the mid-eighties, not that many people were into blues so it wasn't all that easy to get gigs. The bands I played in did R&B and rock just so we could get bookings. When I discovered Son House's music, I think I was about seventeen, it really changed my life. I knew I definitely wanted to play and focus on the blues. But I have never really been a blues purist. I'm open to all the different interpretations from acoustic to electric guitar.

FoD: Do you have any other musical influences in addition to the ones you've already mentioned?

DG: Albert Collins was one of my biggest influences. I was lucky to play with Albert quite a few times and hang out with him. He was a great influence not only as a musician but as a person as well. Magic Sam [Samuel Maghett], Buddy Guy and Jimi Hendrix also contributed to shaping my sound.

FoD: What's the blues scene like out on the west coast?

DG: There's a solid blues scene here, with quite a long history, actually. There have been blues societies popping up all over the place and there are a lot of great blues festivals happening. There's some really good stuff going on. The Yale Hotel in Vancouver has been a bastion for blues for over twenty years and is considered the centre of the blues scene of Western Canada. And there's a great new radio station called Shore 104 that plays a lot of blues.

FoD: Are there any local blues people who inspired you to pursue the blues?

DG: Oh, for sure. I know that Toronto and that whole area around it have produced a lot of great blues bars and people, but so has Vancouver and the area around it. Take Powder Blues Band, for example. I don't think I'd be wrong in saying they're the west coast equivalent of Downchild. Like Downchild, they wrote a lot of good original material that set them apart from the rest of the pack. Jim Byrnes is a local icon. We had Long John

Baldry living here for many years and he did a lot to raise the profile of the blues. It was hard not to notice these guys when I was discovering the scene.

FoD: Do you play much in your neck of the woods?

DG: Not all that much. I've been travelling a lot the last couple of years playing in Europe. I'm hoping to play a bit more in eastern Canada this year, because I haven't been around there much either. I keep travelling outside the country. That's the way to keep it fresh for me. The more places to play, the more places to play, that's the way I look at it. That way I don't have to keep playing the same venues over and over again in Canada. If you're only playing venues in Canada once a year or year-and-a-half it kind of makes people pay more attention when you show up. When I'm home in Nanaimo, I play a lot of the local jams as opposed to headlining a show. We have some great musicians on the Island.

FoD: How are you received in Europe?

DG: Europe has been quite strong for me. I'll be releasing my latest record there, *Different Views*, in about two months. I'll be doing a tour in support of the album starting in September, but before that I'm playing three different festivals in Holland in May. Holland and Germany have been especially good for me. In the last two years, in addition to Holland and Germany, I've played Belgium, France, Switzerland, Austria, the U.K., Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. I haven't been to Eastern Europe yet, but we're working on setting up dates there in the near future.

FoD: You recorded your first album in 1994; then there is a six year gap until your next release. Actually, you released three CDs in 2000 alone. And after that you were more consistent. Why the big gap between your first and second releases?

DG: For my first album "David Gogo", I was signed by Capitol records, which became EMI Music Canada. Up to that point I had done everything independently. But as soon as I got myself a big record company and big management everything went into slow motion and things just sucked all around. They kind of missed the point of who I was as an artist. We made an album that could have been a lot better if they had kept out of it. After that it became kind of a Mexican stand-off, with the EMI people telling me what kind of tunes I should be recording and how to record them. It was either that or I was going to be out of a record deal. So I asked myself, 'who wants a record deal like this?' It took a while to get out of that mess and for the dust to settle and pick up the pieces so I could sign with another label.

FoD: That must have been a very trying time for you.

DG: To say the least. It took me a while to reassess what I wanted to do and to get motivated again, because the whole thing was a truly crappy experience. EMI even took me off the road, which alienated a lot of fans and frustrated me as a performer. But in the end it made me a stronger person and I believe a better blues artist, because I stuck to my

guns. It could have been so easy just to toe the line and see where it would take me. But that wasn't in me. It was about my identity, my dignity and integrity. But pretty well everybody thought I was out of my mind basically telling a company like EMI to go and f**k themselves.

FoD: And that's why it took you six years to release another album.

DG: Exactly. When things started rolling again, I took my band to a local Nanaimo blues bar and over two nights we just ran tape, which resulted in the album *Dine Under the Stars*. Cordova Bay Records released it and they've been my label ever since. The album got all sorts of attention and that's what really got me over to Europe and a record deal there as well.

FoD: Of your ten albums, do you have a personal favourite?

DG: Well, as an artist I always try to make my latest my greatest. You always want to outdo what you did before. So right now I'd say *Different Views* is my favourite. It was a lot of fun to make. It was a lot of fun to play the tunes. Of all my albums, *Skeleton Key* has been the most consistently popular with my fans. I don't sit around and listen to my own albums, but recently I was at a friend's place in Edmonton and he put *Skeleton Key* on. I hadn't heard it for quite some time and it did strike me as a pretty cool record, with a nice mix of originals and cover tunes. And it was well recorded.

FoD: You've been writing most of your own songs pretty well since the beginning.

DG: Yes, either on my own or with a partner. We have a lot of great blues musicians in Canada but not all of them write. If you want to really be noticed and take your career to the next level you have to write your own material. It's great to be able to play and interpret other people's blues songs with the feeling you need to be considered a blues artist. But nothing beats performing your own songs, your own blues experiences. I like the fact that I can bring original songs into the blues. That's very satisfying for me.

FoD: When you want to kick back and listen to some music at home, what do you put on your CD player?

DG: Let me open up my CD player and see what I've been listening to. (A pause while David checks his CD player.) Okay, I got an old Kinks album in there. I still like the '60s stuff that I played when I first started. Here's one my ten year old son turned me on to by the Black Crows. It's their new album which they recorded at Levon Helm's studio. It's pretty neat. And what else have we got? Would you believe Bob Dylan's Christmas album? I like Dylan's music. My girlfriend got me the Beatles Box Set for Christmas, that's in there, too. Actually, I listen to a lot of different kinds of music. And when I'm home I'm a big DVD guy. I like watching movies.

FoD: Any last words?

DG: Go Habs go. (A bit of laughter.) No, actually, I want to say that I'm looking forward to playing The Duck. It's always interesting for me when I get to play as a guest with other musicians. I'm used to playing with my own band so I have a comfort level with them. It's kind of fun playing with other musicians, because it keeps me on my toes. It's all good. See you at The Duck.

FoD: Thanks for your time, David.

DG: It's been a pleasure.

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