

There is no illusion that Jeff Daniels is an accomplished actor and playwright. He works with the biggest names in Hollywood, and he's earned an Emmy for his portrayal of Will McAvoy in the HBO drama 'Newsroom', his talent is versatile and he's achieved success on several levels from which he could easily live just about anywhere, and ironically, that's exactly what he does.

Mr. Daniels isn't just an accomplished actor, he's an accomplished person. He lives where he wants: Chelsea, Mich. - his hometown. It's not unusual for someone to make it as a star and then move to Hollywood, but it is unusual to make it in Hollywood, and then move somewhere else where there aren't any studios, producers or big name agencies. Yet Jeff Daniels thrives. He's successful, Home-spun and yet, unconventional. Okay, there's the obvious statement that can be made:

Yes. He's an actor.

And then it get's not so obvious:

No. He doesn't live in California.

Why?

...and then there's the (somewhat) hidden truth:

He's a musician.

Wait....

Yes. Jeff Daniels is a musician. He recorded an album with The Verve Pipe's Brian Vander Ark titled "Simple Truths" which was released on Boomadeeboom Records, LLC.

Sometimes when you meet someone, you think of that saying: 'Some guys have all the luck', but with Mr. Daniels it's changed slightly: 'Some guys have all the talent.' He has talent, and he uses all of it with the same energy and that has made him

successful, and most even the envy of some of his peers that wouldn't mind stepping out from the grip of Hollywood and walk in his shoes, even if it was just for little while in order to get a sweeter taste of success without all the lights and cameras.

I feel lucky to have this brief encounter with Jeff Daniels, because he doesn't sit still for long, but when he does, you quickly realize his sincerity, his ambition and that he'll gladly share why he chooses to stay in the town where he grew up, and what he likes doing when he's not on tour, or winning an Emmy, or writing, or acting, or....

TS: With all that you have going on it's much appreciated that you're taking some time out for this interview, so I guess in one way it's more like a break for you. Or people who completely aware, Jeff Daniels is on tour, but not as a stage performer in a theatrical sense, but as a musician. How did that come about?

JD: I started playing for the Purple Rose Theatre Company in 2000 as a way to raise money. I had played in a couple bars in New York City in the late 70s and felt completely out of my element. I did enjoy writing songs and applying what I was pulling out of the Stefan Grossman Tablature books. Also saw Doc Watson at the Bottom Line as well as Steve Goodman. Those two shows were turning points. Something to reach for. Anyway, the Purple Rose needed to find new ways to raise money and Lanford Wilson spilled the beans that I played and sang, none of which anyone at the Purple Rose knew - again, I only gigged on my couch - and I played a song Lanford had written the lyrics to, a song called

ROADSIGNS. Guy won a Pulitzer. I enjoy playing that one now. A lot. Anyway, the Purple Rose immediately thought I should go out in front of people and play my songs. Y'know, put on a show. An actual gig. Which seemed like a good idea until I had to actually do it. I was so terrified, I wrote IF WILLIAM SHATNER CAN, I CAN TOO as a way to let everyone know that I was well aware this emperor had forgotten his pants.

TS: Everyone knows you from your movies, and acting as Will Mc Avoy, but don't know you as Jeff Daniels the musician. Has that always been your real passion? What style would you call your music?

JD: Fingerstyle dominates everything I do. Learning how to play the low end of the acoustic with an Alternating Thumb converted me to fingerpicking exclusively. That and the Blues Scales. The songs I write tend to be accessible which speaks to all those musicals I did before I moved to New York in 1976. I try not to write ambiguously. I like people knowing where they are in the song and maybe building to an ending. Not unlike playwriting or basic story telling. Some are funny because I enjoy comedy and I've learned a great deal watching Christine Lavin, Arlo Guthrie, Steve Goodman and Utah Phillips. Even guys like Victor Borge who was a very accomplished pianist, but man could he entertain people. Make 'em laugh. Was he a serious artists? Damn right, he was. I like being able to go both ways, so to speak, make 'em laugh through patter or a song or two and

then hit ‘em with the one that breaks their heart. Makes ‘em cry. Y’know, basic storytelling.

TS: How did you and Brian Vander Ark meet, and what prompted you to produce an album together? Brian Vander Ark is from Michigan as well, and still lives there, you both seem deeply rooted in that state, is that part of the equation?

JD: I’ve just always liked his commitment to his art. He loves music, he’s devoted his life to his music and whether he’s riding the wave of THE FRESHMAN or playing small clubs like I do, he’s all in. Jim Fleming, my music agent, suggested we hook up. Maybe write together. I’d never co-written with anyone. I came from the world where playwrights went away by themselves and came back to the theatre with a script. Brian sent me a couple of songs he was working on and I threw some ideas at them; one was MY LITTLE TOWN and then later on, OVERBOARD. Basically, I made them darker. He liked what we did together, so I asked if he’d consider doing an album of original songs. We spent a good six months writing via email. Sending half-finished songs back and forth, adding, subtracting. When the shootings happened in Baton Rouge, Minnesota and then Dallas - not to mention Ferguson, Charleston and Sandy Hook, etc. - I found the hook for ANOTHER AMERICAN DOWN. I sent Brian a demo where the verses were just me speaking over chords, “Something about Minnesota” and then “Something about Dallas ba-bum ba-bum ba-bum”. That was on a Saturday Morning. By Saturday Night, Brian had fleshed out all the

verses. We added a Bridge and recorded it on Monday and Tuesday. We really wanted SIMPLE TRUTHS to be about the writing. Songs if Jason Isbell heard, he'd say, "Not bad." That was the aim. Recorded over a couple of months at 2188 Studio with my son Ben and Brad Phillips producing. Michigan has some great players and we got them to come in on this one. Great musical imaginations. They'd say, "What do you want me to play?" And we'd say, "Play what you hear." And then I'd get to listen to great musicians play what our song inspired in them. Like hearing your play read for the first time or seeing it performed on Opening Night; you're witnessing something you heard in your head bloom into a garden of creativity and imagination right in front of you.

TS: With your success as an actor, why do you prefer to stay in Chelsea, Michigan and not live in Los Angeles? Even with your music it would seem like you'd want to be on the West Coast. What makes you stay here?

JD: I've never found a place I wanted to be more than home. I gambled that if I concentrated on being the best actor I could be, maybe I could sustain a solid working actor's career and pull off living in the Midwest. The reason that cinched it was that Kathleen and I knew how to raise kids there. We didn't know how to do that in New York or LA and since I secretly didn't think the career would last anyway, when it ended, I'd already be home. So we moved. 1986. Kids turned out fine, career didn't end, and as an actor I'm busier now than I've ever been. That I still have

the energy for all this amazes me. Though, I have been giving some pretty good concerts lately on my couch.

As an actor who plays music, you learn early on that the music business is a separate entity. They're not going to let you do both. Knowing that, I built a music career playing clubs and opera houses which pepper this country and are beautiful places to play. I enjoy the intimacy of the smaller venue. You have to hold them, you have to entertain them, move them, and play well and they're RIGHT THERE! I'm always working on technique and craft and on those nights when I do play well, I'm as satisfied as anything I've felt walking off a stage or a set.

TS: When you're not acting, making music, writing, or performing on stage at the Rose Theater in Chelsea, (wow. Does this guy sleep?) What are the sweet spots in Michigan that you'd recommend to anyone visiting the state you call home? (a.k.a The Wolverine State.)

JD: Anywhere Up North is always a revelation to those who've never experienced Michigan. I'm partial to the Upper Peninsula. I like going up there when I need to get away. Nights so clear you can see satellites moving across the sky. Lake Superior is its own unique beast. Jim Harrison wrote about the U.P. for good reason. There's a lot up there if you know where to look.

TS: Jeff Daniels home and heart is in the state where he grew up, went to college and raises his family. He's famous. He can

live where he wants, and he chooses Michigan. There's nothing wrong with that, in fact, everything seems right about it. Jeff Daniels proves that you don't need to move away from where your home is to be considered a success. Thanks so much, Jeff, for giving this interview, and who knows, maybe we'll see you in Michigan when we travel and explore the state you call home.

JD: Go Tigers.