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## Daniels a reluctant musician, too

By **BRUCE KIRKLAND, SUN MEDIA**

NEW YORK -- Jeff Daniels is a guy with a guitar, a song and the skill to put it over with the polish of a professional. But he is worried about the cliché of being a celebrity actor who takes the stage for a concert.

"It is a joke," he tells Sun Media about the Hollywood stars who front bands in their spare time. "I've been doing it privately for 30 years with no intention of bringing it out. None! Zero! Sit on my porch, get better, make up songs. I just enjoyed it. It was just a place where I went to relax, to get away from everything."

Five years ago, however, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lanford Wilson handed his pal Daniels lyrics for a song he wrote in 1978, encouraged him to set it to music and demanded he perform it for the staff of Daniels' own Purple Rose Theatre in Chelsea, Michigan.

"The Purple Rose people," Daniels remembers now, "they said, 'Why haven't you ... ?' And I went, 'Because I don't want to be Kevin Bacon or Russell Crowe or Billy Bob Thornton.'"

But he had no choice at the time. The Purple Rose was dark for Christmas and New Year's weeks and needed a fundraiser. It was Daniels, alone on stage with his guitar. "In the first year, it was kind of a train wreck. I mean, I was so terrified - because you're naked. There is no five-piece band behind you to take the solo."

The 10-night engagement raised \$100,000 for the Purple Rose, one-fifth of the annual target, and became a tradition. Today, says Daniels, performing has become a passion and he has just increased his public bookings, playing small clubs in cities from Boston to New York to Detroit, with a possible appearance in Winnipeg, where he is shooting a movie. He even has live CDs to sell.

"It worked," he says of the experience. "For the most part, they bought it. And it's fun for me."