

2004

Actor's musical effort is downright refreshing

By Chris Rietz For the Lansing State Journal

Even if you can't forgive him for "Dumb & Dumber," you've got to love actor Jeff Daniels -for starters, there's his resolute insistence on being a Regular Guy.

He's also been living in his hometown of Chelsea for well over a decade, and he's the founder and director of the town's Purple Rose Theatre Company, a professional repertory company conceived as a venue for heartland playwrights and actors -and it's to benefit his beloved PRTC that he released his debut CD this past August.

Yes, we know what you're thinking -and so does he, which is why the opening track is titled "If William Shatner Can, I Can Too." The bargain bins are littered with records made by Hollywood types who've decided they're "singers," and Daniels doesn't shrink from harpooning plenty of them by name.

A pre-emptive strike, maybe, but the good news is that Jeff Daniels is no Shatner. In fact he's a fine singer, a serviceable guitarist and, not surprisingly, he's genuinely entertaining through every one of the CD's 68-plus minutes - and hilariously funny, too.

Produced by Steve Curran of Lansing's Harvest Music and Sound Design, and mastered by East Lansing's tireless Glenn Brown, "Live" was recorded over two shows at the Purple Rose last winter.

Many of the songs, both funny and poignant, seem to be about the hometown in some way: the anguish of the lifelong Tigers fan, CKLW on the old blue Valiant, hearing Rockwell's chimes from the porch swing.

But despite Daniels' outsized celebrity, "Live" is a winner for the same reason any good songwriter's CD would be: it's musical, funny, honest and uncomplicated, and rendered by someone who knows how to be on stage.

After two generations' worth of mumbling Dylan wannabes endlessly tuning their guitars, that's downright refreshing.

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