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Music lets well-known actor display his comedy chops

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Sometimes Jeff Daniels will be in the middle of a concert and he'll think to himself, "This is like a mini-Broadway musical." He acts, he sings, he plays guitar.



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Jeff Daniels is bringing the tour for his fourth album, 2009's "Live at the Purple Rose," to Maine this weekend.

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JEFF DANIELS

WHEN: 8 p.m. Friday (ages 21 and older); 7:30 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: The Landing at Pine Point, 353 Pine Point Road, Scarborough; The Grand, 165 Main St., Ellsworth

HOW MUCH: \$20 to \$30 Friday; \$32 Saturday

INFO:

www.thelandingatpinepoint.com

;

www.grandonline.org

With movies including "Dumb and Dumber," "Gettysburg," "The Squid and the Whale" and "Terms of Endearment," Daniels may be best known for his cinematic career. He's received multiple nominations and awards for his film work and a Tony Award nomination for lead actor in the Broadway production of "God of Carnage."

What many people may not be aware of is that Daniels has had a decades-long love affair with writing and performing his own songs. In 2004, he released his first CD as a way to raise money for his Purple Rose Theatre Company in Michigan.

He released his fourth album, "Live at the Purple Rose," last year, and has finally carved out some time in his schedule to tour behind it. He'll be performing at the Landing at Pine Point in Scarborough on Friday and at the Grand in Ellsworth on Saturday.

Daniels' first album, "Live and Unplugged," revealed to the world that not only is he a terrific actor, he's an accomplished songwriter with a knack for reflecting on daily life with a sharp sense of humor.

"I never understood why comedy is treated like a second-class citizen," Daniels said. "Comedy is hard to do well it's not just telling jokes. The best comedy, I find, is really about the listener. The best comedy is true."

Some of the stories Daniels tells in his songs seem so hysterical they are hard to believe, but, he insists, they really are true.

Take, for example, "Recreational Vehicle," in which he tells the story of his family's first outing in an RV. "My middle son tapes me on the shoulder and says, 'Hey, Dad. Where's Mom?' I said, 'Son, do not screw with me at this moment. I'm driving a building.' And then my daughter, whom I trust, said, 'No, Dad. She's not here.' "

And then there's "Have a Good Life," a song about road rage. Daniels explains in the song that he was driving along and had the right of way, but almost ran some guy down. The guy was outraged and made no effort to hide it ("anatomical references filled the air"). "The guy was screaming at me," Daniels recounted, "and I turn to my wife and say, 'This would make a really good song.' "

Ideas for songs come at him from all over the place, Daniels said. The title for "Let's Take Our Pants Off and Relax" came from one of those awkward dances in which two people in a tight space move in the same direction. Instead of saying "May I have this dance?" Daniels' "dance partner" said, "Let's take our pants off and relax." Daniels immediately recognized that phrase as a song.

"You've got to have the radar out," he said.

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