

“Something That I Am”: Jordan Danielsen, “Night Alone in the City”

Written by Jeff Ignatius
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Jordan Danielsen has made his living exclusively from music for seven years now, so it might seem a little strange that he’s in his fourth semester studying music performance at Black Hawk College.

Part of the impetus, he said in an interview last month, was expanding his performance repertoire from his natural instruments of guitar and harmonica to piano and drums. And some of it was self-improvement, a desire to learn to read music and to better hear harmonies.

But he also had an eye to his career, hoping to meet horn players and wanting to learn to write charts so other musicians could play them. The ultimate goal appears to be flexibility – the ability to hire the musicians he needs at any time to get what he wants for a project, without being reliant on a fixed band.

The 31-year-old Danielsen recently released his debut CD, the 14-track *Night Alone in the City*, and it’s largely the product of years hosting open-mic nights at venues such as Davenport’s Bier Stube. The songs are straightforward and seem designed to connect instantly to an audience; one can almost hear where Danielsen expects a cheer or a laugh from his listeners. In that sense, the album works, even though the songs outside of a live context feel somewhat thin. (“Open Mic” probably works as a tone-setting invitation in front of bar patrons, but it feels out-of-place on a CD.)

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Still, there’s no denying the coarse appeal of the mocking lyrics and the muscular drums and guitar of “Living in a Rap Video” – a merciless take-down of white hip-hop poseurs – or the food-based double entendres laid on thick in the funk of “Stick It in the Oven.” “Mr. K-I-N-K-Y” never gets past *single* entendres, but its shameless lust – a gush of words delivered deftly – comes off as charming and innocent in the absence of any menace: “Well I’m convinced that you induce me with some kinky kind of potion / ‘Cause the way you walk it makes me want to rub you down with lotion.”

And outside of those tongue-in-cheek tracks, Danielsen displays a wide range, adept at everything from guitar workouts (“Flood”) to solid, unpretentious rockers (“Come on Home to Me Baby”) to gentle, good-natured numbers accented by horns.

Those horn parts, on the warm remembrance of “Summer of 99” and the soulful “Company,” were developed with Black Hawk’s Edgar Crockett, and they represent an epiphany Danielsen had while recording the album over three years. He said he had originally hoped to capture the live sound of his band – guitarist Dustin Cobb, bassist Sam Doak, drummer Chris Cushman, and percussionist Terry Hanson. But he said that “as it went on, you start to see possibilities” beyond the standard live performance.

While *Night Alone in the City* features plenty of relatively loud and aggressive songs, Danielsen said his next recording will likely be more of a reflection of the acoustic shows he performs solo several nights a week. “This was really my rockin’ CD,” he said. “From now on, it’s probably going to be a little more laid back.”

It’s obvious that he views his music through a lens of potential commercial success. When I asked him about his favorite songs on *Night Alone in the City*, he said that two – “Summer of 99” and “Company” – were “the hits, the singles.”

“I dream big,” Danielsen said. He said that although a son would keep him from touring nationally, he aspires to perform throughout the Midwest.

But if that doesn’t happen, he said, he’s fulfilled: “If I don’t ever get any bigger than this, I’m still

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doing what I want to do, and I still think it's successful. It's not just something that I do; it's something that I am. ... If I'm 31 and I'm still thinking the same way as I was when I was 14, it's probably not going to change.”

Night Alone in the City *is available from* CDBaby.com , *Amazon.com*, and *iTunes*.

For more information on Jordan Danielsen, visit ReverbNation.com/jordandanielsen or [Jordan Danielsen.com](http://JordanDanielsen.com)