

## Jeffrey Daniels - Pizza Express Maidstone 29-3-08

After graciously giving us thirty minutes of his time for an interview, Jeffrey Daniels entertained a packed dining audience with two forty-five minute sets showcasing The Jeffrey Daniels Experience, with backing vocalists and a baddass bunch of musicians. Gliding smoothly like his famous moonwalk through a melody of Shalamar classics, "A Night To Remember", "There It Is" and "I Can Make You Feel Good", he magically cast a spell of dementia, as the focus was on him...without Howard and Jody. He also paid homage to other artists, including The Sugar Hill Gang (Rappers Delight), in particular an almost Prince take on JB's "Make It Funky".

We were asked to be silent whilst awaiting the JD Experience Pt 2, upon which in the distance we could hear a buzzing bazooka noise followed by Jeffery Daniel pop lock and robotwacking through the totally mesmerised seated audience like a cyborg onto the stage. After the deserved rapturous applause, Jeffrey, still slim and lean and performing like The J5's song "Dancin' Machine" previewed new material, "Amazing Poetry", "Woman Is God's Gift To Man" and "Back To The World". Truly a night to remember; The JD experience made a massive dent in Kent!!

**Fitzroy**



## JEFFREY DANIEL TALKS TO FITZROY da BUZZBOY



I understand you met Jody at church pre-teenage before you and she teamed up to become the dynamic duo and before you became part of the magic number 3 that became Shalamar. Where was this and what was the community you lived in like? A church upbringing suggests it was a close one and how was family life for young JD, brothers and sisters?

You're talking about something that people don't ask about so they don't know. Actually my godfather was the Reverend James Cleveland, the king of Gospel, that's who I was living with and that's how I met Jody through our church because her father was a minister in Chicago. I met Jody's mother and father and older brother before I'd even met Jody cause Jody was too young to come up to LA and came up when she was 12 years old for a visit for the summer and went back to Chicago and then came back to live in LA when she was about 16. She was like a family friend, long before we were dancing together on Soul Train. She danced with whoever she danced with, I started with my older sister Joyce, until she had other interests boys...(Anna & I both laugh). I got mad one time cause a good record came on and I wanted to dance and I couldn't find her so I said I aint gonna dance with you no more so I danced with different people Then I went to Jody's house and started making up routines for the two of us to dance to on the show and we became permanent partners on Soul Train and became one of the most noticeable couples on the show.

What year are we talking here?

We talkin'75-76 and Shalamar started in 77.

Ok excellent, did you say this was LA?

Yeah Los Angeles, I'm one of the only people I know in the business who was born and raised there. Jody's from Chicago and Howard's from Ohio.

When I watch old clips of you on Soul Train it reminds me of the Spike Lee epic film Crooklyn when the young kids watch it and try to emulate the moves. I understand you site Don Campbell as the father of Locking, Tyrone Proctor who was the premier 'Wack' dancer and The Electric Boogaloo, led by Boogaloo Sam as those you admired before you started to dance like you had ants in your pants? How phenomenal were these guys, as we only really get to see that style elevated in 80's films like Break Dance and the amazing Wildstyle?

Ok another good question you're asking. First of all Don Campbell was on Soul Train first, and I was one of those kids in Crooklyn, watching it on TV at home and it just blew my

mind. I was already dancing, during high school me and my sister Joyce used to get into contests and no-one could beat us and my older sister was a cheerleader, so we were always dancing and singing in church. So when I saw Locking it just took me to another level because it totally contradicted anything I'd seen as far as dancing, stopping, sticking out your own hand and giving yourself five, pointing in the air and jumping. It was just amazing the timing of it, body isolations and the robot. I just went bananas, I'd be walking down the hallways at school banging on the lockers, people looking at me like what is wrong with this guy (we all laugh at the image of that). It totally blew my mind, and Tyrone Proctor was on Soul Train, in fact he helped get me on to Soul Train and helped teach us the style of dancing which is called Wack dancing. He's the premier Wack dancer and he's in New York teaching now. Then later came the Boogaloo, but they didn't come through Soul Train, they came from Long Beach and I'd heard of them but kinda had to look for them to find them. Cashcrew Coolie was the first one to teach me popping when popping came along, but the Electric Boogaloo and Boogaloo style was Poppin Pete. They are the ones who invented Popping and Boogalooing, that was the last one to come along. That came around 79 when I got into it.

So many of today's dance moves were like break street dancing and Kronking borrows elements from the fantastic array of executed routines I've seen on Soul Train. It almost seems like what was going on then was so ahead of it's time that like in Crooklyn at the end of the film where they show the Soul Train dancers in cink. The mid 90's Crooklyn Dodgers "Crooklyn" feat Special Ed Buckshot and Masta Ace down tempo hip hop classic over the muted up tempo 70's music. Do you feel like an innovator today when you witness 30 years later something that was as natural as the afro you used to wear?

Ok I'm gonna answer something that I didn't get to answer the second part of your question but I'll get to that as it's moving in the same direction. First let's go to the Break Dance movies and stuff that were made in the 80's. Myself and Micheal Jackson unanimously agree to this; those movies kinda like bastardised the movement because popping locking robodywacking, that came from the West Coast Break Dancing. Spinning on your head and the acrobatics.. that came from the East Coast and it was all the beginning of the Hip Hop movement. But these movies, the producers and directors they didn't really come to the source they just wanted to make money and get the people they knew to do it. They didn't really put it together respectfully so everything's called break dancing. I stopped that style of dancing for about 15 years. I evolved with Hip Hop, house dancing and things that came along cause if I went out to do the dancing I helped to pioneer.. I'd be looked at as I'm part of that and I wasn't you know.. no disrespect to the other dancers. Now when I see Kronking and Krump clowning I'm so inspired when I see these new kids come with their energy and what they are bringing to the table and I only feel like a pioneer for one reason cause they tell me that I am and they give me the respect that I have and for that reason I accept their respect for me as I respect them. If I see something hot and new...I'm on it, I'm loving it. I might not be able to do all that but some of that new stuff I'm seeing, I'm like God look at these guys. I've been in Japan for a long time so I'm seeing things from a long distance, I'm logging into it thinking these guys whoa!!

There were a whole whose list of artists who performed on

the Soul Train show, which do you remember most fondly? Also I have a DVD of some of James Brown's appearances, did you ever see him on the show or better still meet and do the James Brown with the Soul Bro No 1.

I never had a chance unfortunately to dance with him but when I was a kid watching him on TV, I was dancing all the time and doing the James Brown of course. We met him on the airplane and that was the first time I had a chance to speak with him but I did see him perform on Soul Train, but in my mind out of several people's appearances who stand out for me on Soul Train was when the Average White Band played live, when David Bowie came on cause that was very unconventional, this white guy on a soul music show, he was very well received and it worked. Barry White set up his whole orchestra on Soul Train and performed. Elton John came on with a glass see-through piano we were like WWowww!! And when the Jackson 5 came it was like pandemonium, trying to get in that place was amazing. Being a Soul Train dancer and even though we weren't getting paid and just the dancers on the show, to see these people performing upfront of you and other people had to pay for tickets to see these people and we'd see them free. That in itself was priceless and I had no idea that one day I'd be one of those performers performing myself and when that happened it was like I was in a dream the first time I stood on that stage.

What was the great and legendary Don Cornelious like, was he as smooth and as charismatic as her appeared?

Why are you asking me the best questions? Nobody asks these things. Don Cornelious is a character. We always said him and Dick Griffey, who set up Solar Records and Berry Gordy's included, those moulds are broken and there will never be people made like them again. I mean these guys are real, the way they talk, their attitude. I mean Don ..he has a wall between him and all the dancers, he'd stand on the side where all the monitors were, dancers were not allowed over there. Now Don loved me like a son but his expression to me was (Jeffrey simulates an impression in a deep Barry White tone) "Hey Jeff" ....that means he loves me! (we all laugh). Other than that there were times when he supported us when we really needed it. Don Cornelious, he created a platform for so many artists cause this is the way they kept us down. In America during the 70's just coming out of the 60's, you know it was still very black and white, if you weren't in the top ten or top whatever you couldn't get on any shows. But Soul Train provided that ladder to be exposed to the nation for those on their way up, which invariably caused people to be much more popular quicker. Soul Train is the longest running TV show in America and it's still going. I have to give recognition to Don Cornelious and Soul Train and his vision by bringing it to the American television. It created a career for me, the young Jackson 5, Aretha Franklyn, other groups that were on their way up that couldn't get on the major shows, it gave them that launching pad that boosted them up there, so we all owe a debt of gratitude to Soul Train.

A question you may have been frequently asked, but a necessary one. How did you go from dancing to becoming the main core of Shalamar? Dick Griffey did with Solar what Berry Gordy did with Motown, build an entourage of talent into a formidable leading label of the 70' and the 80's with artists like the Whisper, Carrie Lucas, Midnight Star and Leon Sylvers at the helm, some of which did backing vocals for you. Can you describe the excitement to rub shoulders with these influential individuals?

Dick Griffey was in the studio and Don Cornelious was there and they came to me with the idea of Shalamar, I'm the first member of Shalamar and I brought Jody and Gerald Brown into it. The Whispers were the first group on Solar and Carrie Lucas, who was Dick Griffey's wife at the time and now Carrie

Lucas's daughter is the female vocalist in Shalamar. It's because Jody never sang before Shalamar, I was in a youth choir and Jody was in the congregation. I had to teach Jody how to sing and help train her vocals, that's why on Shalamar's first album we had The Whispers and Carrie Lucas help singing background vocals because Jody didn't have the experience yet. Then on the second album Jody was beginning to sing more so we let her sing her part by herself and me and Gerald would sing ours and Leon would throw the things together. Then after we did the tour and once she got the experience of doing it ...Jody was gone - that's all she needed. I asked Howard first who refused and then Gerald who agreed. For the second time around (he says as a pun with a cheesy grin and Anna & I smile). Howard did say yes and that was our first gold single.

That's funny cause I was gonna ask you a question later. It's kind of ironic that he came back for the second time and recorded that single.

(JD interjects) Nothing to do with it, it was just a coincidence but they say God don't make no mistakes!!



The name Shalamar has origins coming from an Asian Indian culture. Who picked the name and why?

The very first producer, Simon Soussan, he's from Morocco and he's the one that put together the track Uptown Festival and he came up with the name Shalamar. He's from that part of the world, I'm from the ghetto in LA so (he laughs as he speaks) I would never have heard of that name!!

The original line up had two other male vocalists, Gary Mumford and Gerald Brown before Howard Hewitt, who had previously been considered came into the picture? I understand they were not as committed to the cause as you and Jody were, was it ever on the cards for you to do lead vocals?

At that time I was into dancing, having been in the church choir I knew harmonies. I'm a musician and played piano, that is a good question cause they didn't consider me and that was one of the problems with me and Jody Don Cornelious and Dick Griffey had. Cause we came from Soul Train they kept looking at us as the kids from Soul Train, even though they knew we were working in a group situation, they said we need a great singer with these kids dancers with great energy and image, so with all this in mind they were always looking for a formidable lead vocalist. Gerald Brown was a member of the Soul Train Gang singing group and Dick warned me that Gerald could be a handful of trouble. Didn't think about it till we got on the road then I got a taste of Gerald Brown and he played himself out of the group. It wasn't because he wasn't committed, we were on a promotional tour and he was expecting to get rich off it. There was no MTV, there was no way that the nation could see us at a glance and buy copies. We had to do the Chitlin Circuit in nick and crynie towns like Texas, Louisiana, Alabama,

Iowa, Montana, places he didn't think we could go. But Dick Griffey he was smart, he took us grass roots, we went to retailers and radio stations, people shaking our hands. We did shows, sometimes ten, 15 people would show up, sometimes a couple hundred but we went on and did the tour and he left us in the middle of the tour expecting a call.... well I called Howard Hewitt!! So Gerald Brown is still waiting on that phone call (we found that quite funny). He tried to play a power move and it backfired on him and that's how he got out of the group and then when Howard came it was the Shalamar!!

Unknown to you I danced on Top of the Pops in the 80's, in fact to "I Can Make You Feel Good."

Really?

The show's choreographer, Flick Colby, said she thought I was a good dancer, so I danced as they panned the camera out for the last 20 seconds of the show...that's my claim to fame with Shalamar.

Hold on... I think I've seen that clip!!

(I laugh out) I hope you have!! Seriously though, and excuse the pun, but I believe A Night To Remember made an impact in more ways than one, as you without Jody Watley, for the benefit of those who don't remember, performed a body pop lock routine on Top Of The Pops that apparently gained more viewers than Coronation Street .Was this a turning point in your career?

Most definitely!! I flew over here for I Can Make You Feel Good, you probably had my spot (he jokes) but that week it stayed in the same place or went down, so I wasn't able to go on Top Of The Pops. So I went to Amsterdam and to Ireland to do the promotion and went back to America. I got another call saying ok Jeffrey A Night To Remember is going to enter at number 30 so they flew me back again. I got to my hotel room and put a routine together. I used to dress crazy, that stuff I wore on the show I used to wear stuff like that all the time. So that time I had a chance to go on. Then me and Simon who worked for WEA was in Amsterdam to continue promoting and Simon comes banging on my door, Jeffrey Jeffrey, I said what's going on he said we got to go back to London everybody's looking for you. Why what did I do? That thing you did on Top Of The Pops last night everybody's going nuts. When I couldn't get on Top Of The Pops with I Can Make You Feel Good Simon called up Record Mirror, Smash Hits and say "We got Jeffrey Daniel from Shalamar "they responded" Oh yeh.... La di da." showing a lack of interest. Now.... all these people were looking for me and that was it!! It was the turning point for more than that cause also I had a chance to introduce to the UK and Europe a dance they'd never seen before. Paul McCartney was watching it with his children so he recruited me for his movie "Give My Regards To Broad Street. It also later established me worldwide, as in America they already knew me as a dancer from Soul Train every week but now the world saw me as a dancer and it gave me another prestige and it helped Shalamar to sell. In fact it helped break Shalamar here in the UK and after that I became a choreographer working with other people. It was a turning point and I'll be forever grateful to everyone for the reception I got.

You left in 83 to 84 when you went to take the role of Electra in the Starlight Express, the roller skating musical at the Apollo Vic in SW1. Now I worked front of house at the time, that's where I first met you.

Oh really.

Yep my friend Caron Cardell was in the show as well as friends I made later, Atlee Baptiste, Sebastian Craig & Richard Bodkin (The Rockies).

Of course I love those guys!!

I'm assuming roller skating was another one of your hidden

talents from growing up in the USA? On your arrival, how were you welcomed by the cast and Arlene Phillips, as they must have been in awe to meet you as your success was already documented worldwide.

For me I was very nervous and very scared as I'd never worked without Jody and Howard. My career had always been Soul Train and Shalamar and another thing was I never had that kind of a job where you go to the same place every day. I'm used to going on tour and being in different places. I'm by myself. I left Shalamar, came to the UK, nobody promise me nothing and the funny thing about it is Andrew Lloyd Webber's company was calling me and I was hanging up. Some people want me to be in some play and I don't know who this is. A friend of mine name Void, who got in the show because of me..

I remember and knew Void cause she was going out with Atlee Baptiste.



OK Void saw me in a club one night and said "Do you know The Really Useful Company? I said yeah someone called me about some play or something, I don't know what their talking about. She said "Jeffrey you know Andrew Lloyd Webber and saw my reaction ...I didn't react. She said "Jeffrey do you know who Andrew Lloyd Webber is?" I said ..."No" she said "Do you know Cats?" I said "Of course I know Cats", she said "You know Evita,?" I said "I saw Evita in America". She said "Jeffrey.. that's Andrew Lloyd Webber." I said "Oh my God" (myself and Anna let out a gasp of amazement). I said to Void "I'll go only if you come with me" and I took Jody to the audition too. Me and Jody used to skate when she was 12, me and Jody can skate, we danced on skates I was already a skater and I helped teach half of that cast how to skate. Arlene Phillips really couldn't choreograph me, she'd ask "Jeffrey how do you get them from here to here?" And she'd watch what I'd do. Not discrediting her, she's a great choreographer, but what I do growing up on skates is part of my culture, so they be like ok that's good lets try that!! It allowed me to be on stage and shake the Queen's hand. Her Royal Highness came on stage after the opening and shook my hand, it's a thought in my life I'll never forget!! Apart from working with Andrew Lloyd Webber, come on, with Trevor Nunn and Arlene Phillips, it's another glowing experience in my life!

In Micheal Jackson's Bad video there was a young Wesley Snipes as one of the gang dancers, how good was he as a dancer?

Wesley Snipes was an actor in the video and not on the dance side. He was paid to look mean.

Unknown to you three days ago I interviewed someone who said that whilst in the USA working with Luther Vandross he was introduced to Dick Griffey and Shalamar in the late 70's and even did hand claps on your track "Second Time Around. Years later he was an uninvited guest at a Warner Brothers

Event with Fred Dove who was head of Warner's promotions at the time and you were being honoured for services to the industry. In your acceptance speech, to his and everyone's surprise you personally thanked him...his name is Chris Hill.

Chris Hill the Dj? Ok yeah yeah.

He said he was so shocked and that was a moment he remembers thinking ..."They mentioned me?"

Yes I do. The only reason why is because a lot of people don't know that I started DJing when I danced on Soul Train. We'd have the Soul Train night at this club on a Sunday where the dancers went. Now I was laying 45's and when 12 inches first came out Evelyn Champagne Kings "Shame", Peter Browns "Do You Wanna Get Funky" Donna Summer's "Love to Love You Baby". So if I knew people were DJ's I understood the importance of what they do so yeah... I remember him.

Last question. You kind of covered it earlier when you did that programme, Hit Me Baby One More Time. Are you not in touch with Jody any more? She's retired from the business now?

I'm not in touch with Jody now cause I move too much. I've been in Japan and now I've moved back to the UK. Actually I still got my place in Japan so people can't keep up with me. I think Jody's moved too but she was adamant about not coming back to Shalamar. From what I hear she's breaking associations with Soul Train and Shalamar ..I don't know why cause those are our roots and that's what got us to where we are anyway. Carolyn is a big fan of Jody, she grew up with us being in the studio. Carolyn would prefer Jody to be in the group but Jody's very adamant about not doing it. Howard and I, we've done shows as Shalamar featuring Jeffrey Daniel and Howard Hewitt, just the two of us, I always felt funny about replacing Jody in the group as she's more than just a girl. Her and I were family friends before Shalamar and

she's part of the family too and the girl can sing!!

Well look you gave us half an hour and we've got an extra 2 minutes, thank you very much. We appreciate you taking the time, we gonna hang out, eat some food and watch the show!!

Thank you Soul Survivors!!

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