

A Conversation with Daniel Tashian
by Frank Goodman (12/2007, puremusic.com)

Among discerning fans of Puremusic, the name of Daniel Tashian may well ring a bell. He's popped up in a number of reviews and interviews of artists through the years: Josh Rouse and Carter Wood, Patty Griffin and others. Whether on drums, keyboards, bass, guitar, ukulele, or for his singular vocal stylings, he's a go-to vibe guy for many in Music City.

So we were glad for the occasion to engage him in some discussion about his career path to date, in particular his second record with a group first called The Bees, and now The Silver Seas. Although not household names outside town, to Nashville insiders their individual talents connote a supergroupish quality. Aside from Tashian (son of Barry and Holly Tashian, themselves distinguished musicians), The Silver Seas is John Deaderick on bass (who's toured the world as keyboardist for the likes of The Dixie Chicks, James Taylor, Patty Griffin and Michael MacDonald), Jason Lehning on keyboards (known primarily as one of the highly sought after engineers and mastering guys of town, whose dad Kyle is a legendary producer of Randy Travis and many others, but whose musical talents are above and beyond), and the soulful pop-wise David Gehrke on drums. Everybody sings, well.

This CD is really a re-issuing of a The Bees record called *High Society*, which we reviewed previously. The best news is that it now has some machinery like management, publicity, and a label behind it to propel it into well deserved quarters. Tashian says in our conversation he'd love to see one of the tunes end up the theme of a sitcom, and I can think of no better example than the title song. There are lots of us out there, apparently, who don't think that soft rock is square or flaccid. Beautiful pop songs are actually still what turn many of us on the most, and what ultimately stand the cruel test of time.

And now, we bring you this conversation with one of Nashville's most interesting hipsters and creative musicians, Daniel Tashian of The Silver Seas.

Puremusic: I'm so happy that we're going to have this talk today, because I'm a very big fan of the CD *High Society*.

Daniel Tashian: Oh, thank you so much for that, Frank. Thank you. I really appreciate your encouragement.

PM: Yeah, it's a super, super record. Now, it first came out as a group called The Bees, right?

DT: That's right.

PM: So what's the story there? Why was that name re-thought, or moved on from?

DT: Well, this was a little bit of a sore subject for me, only because we actually technically used the name first. But there's another band in England that used the name. And they're also quite good. But nevertheless, we used the name in 1999. We actually played a show with Badly Drawn Boy in 1999--

PM: Wow.

DT: --and used the name at the old Slow Bar. So we did use it commercially first, although the other group used it commercially first in England. And unfortunately, they sort of made a name for themselves over there under that name, even though they used it after we did. So when we were getting ready to--we signed a licensing deal with a great label in L.A. called Cheap Lullaby, and Joe Ross and those guys are really cool guys. And they said, "Look, the feedback we're getting from your"--this is probably boring as hell, but anyway--

PM: No, no. It's actually interesting, I think.

DT: He said the feedback they were getting from some of their publicity team was that they didn't want to go and try to sell this record and have to explain every time, "No, this is a different group." They wanted the band and the record to be able to stand on its own without that. And whether that is succeeding or not, I don't know, because the majority of interview questions I tend to be hearing have to do with this.

PM: Oh, really? Well, we'll just move on from that. But I just wanted to handle it.

DT: But sure, yeah. And I think that's pretty much the deal. But actually I have gotten some encouraging emails from people who are long-time fans of the band and were fans of The Bees who actually felt they even like the new name better, that it fit the music more. So I'm sort of fine with that. As Shakespeare said, what's it about--what's in a rose that we call a name, or whatever.

PM: Indeed. [laughs] I feel the same way. As long as you've got a good name now, which you do, The Silver Seas, it really rocks. It's evocative without being too specific, and it's descriptive. It kind of puts you in a good place.

DT: Well, good. Thanks for that.

PM: Now, for Nashville insiders, The Silver Seas has kind of a super group aspect to some degree, at least certainly a very talented lineup. Before we talk about you in particular, let's talk about the other cats, what they do and what they've done.

DT: Sure. Okay, well, let's see. We'll start with the drums, David Gehrke, he's sort of an acquired taste.

PM: [laughs] That's funny.

DT: But I've definitely acquired it. I really enjoy how he plays--he is sort of the core of the group, as far as rhythmically what I think gives our band our swing and our groove has to do with the interplay between David's high-hat and snare drum and my acoustic guitar right hand, so we're kind of the rhythm section.

And John Deaderick on the bass, he does supply groove, but he's such a great musician and has got such a great musical mind that his approach on the bass is very melodic, and it's orchestral.

PM: Yeah, because he's a lot more than a bass player. He's just a bass player in *this* band.

DT: That's right. So that's kind of exciting, because he knows what note to play under things that can be cool passing tones, it can kind of shift the chord in a way that's an interesting way that makes it a little more complex.

PM: And when he's playing the third or the sixth, he knows it, and he knows why.

DT: That's right. Of course, John brings more to the band than just sort of that aspect. He's obviously--we love having him around because he's so funny and just such a great personality and such a great balance. Between me and David and Jason, things can get a little bit serious in the studio. And John is a great element to throw into the mix that kind of breaks things up.

Now Jason is like a Swiss jeweler. I mean, he's very precise and his attention to detail is at such a level that that's why our records really have a great sound is that he takes incredible time and care with every little sound. But you need to have a balance. I feel really fortunate to work with the team that we have.

PM: Because as great as the songs are, as great as the tracks are, the fidelity in the recording and the mastering is just really pristine.

DT: Yeah. And that's an important thing, and you can't really get that by barreling through too fast, which is sort of what I like to do.

PM: Yeah. And you can't get it by fudging on the back end.

DT: Yeah.

PM: You can hang in there through the mix and the mastering--

DT: That's right.

PM: --but the long hours of making it right--

DT: And he's that. Jason just really has great follow-through. And I learn a lot from him. And also, while we're blowing these various horns, let's not diminish the fact that aside from this, he always seems to be recognized for that, but let's also recognize the fact that his skills as an arranger are very much in play in these records. He went to Berklee, and he's the only guy in the band besides John that I know of who can actually pull out a piece of paper and write music actually on the staff and then sit down at the piano and play it. He'll get an idea for a part and he'll just pull out some staff paper and write it out. He'll score it. And he also comes up with these unconventional arrangement ideas. So I mean, I'm sort of in the pentatonic level of music--

PM: [laughs]

DT: --where I know a few blues scales, and I learned a major 7th chord, and I pretty much took off from there.

PM: [laughs] That's very humble about your many talents. So if you will try and suspend your humility for a few moments, I want to talk about yourself. And certainly in Puremusic you've come up more than a few times for your contributions to the records we've covered.

DT: Right.

PM: So allow me to take it back to the top with you, if you would, and let's talk about your folks, from whence you came.

DT: Okay, sure. Well, I think the thing that I sort of keep coming back to as being like a huge influence on me was really the influence of the Everly Brothers and of the Louvin Brothers on my parents, and how hearing those duets as kids really inspired them. And then when they got together they wanted to sing together. So really my first musical memories, as far back as I can remember, even like one or two years old, I remember songs like, "If I Could Only Win Your Love," and "Bye Bye Love," and "Cathy's Clown."

PM: Unbelievable songs.

DT: And "You're Running Wild" by the Louvin Brothers, and these kinds of things. Hearing those two voices together really gave me, as a child, kind of a taste for those nice tension notes that you hear. And you hear them in the Beatles. So that was my melodic thing, was really coming from those groups, I think the Louvin brothers and the Beatles and the Everly Brothers. And we try to get into a little bit of the "Walk Right Back" and those type of feels and "Cathy's Clown" even on "Hard Luck Tom." I'm always chasing that sound.

PM: Amazing.

DT: Let me see, what else was I going to say about my folks?

PM: Well, I mean, it's certainly a well-known bit of trivia that your dad Barry's group, The Remains, opened for the Beatles at Shea Stadium.

DT: Yeah, that's right. And then hearing that kind of music of course was a big influence. Well, it's sort of British--influenced by the British Invasion. [Here's a clip of "Ain't That Her" by Barry & The Remains from their 1996 album--find out more about them at theremains.com.] Really, when I listen to The Remains' record, I mean, it's hard to beat as far as the way it sounds, recording by Roy Haley and--

PM: Oh, I didn't know that.

DT: --in CBS Studios in New York. And they cut stuff down here with Billy Sherrill, who produced all those great duet records with George and Tammy--I don't really feel like I've even approached the kind of sonic level, what they were reaching for. And that's the thing, with each project we try to--we are in this for the long haul, and I would say with each record we're adding a few more notches on the belt.

PM: Well, as your personal story developed, having been influenced by the folks the way you were, and being such good musicians, not just musicians the way--a lot of musicians had musical parents, but you had very musical parents.

DT: Right, right.

[Here's a clip of Daniel's parents doing "I Know One," from Holly & Barry Tashian's 1994 album *Straw Into Gold*. More about them at tashianmusic.com.]

PM: Then you had a record deal early on in your teens, right?

DT: Uh-huh. And that's always been a little bit of a point of pride for me, because I remember reading Paul McCartney's book *Many Years From Now*, and he mentioned about having musical parents. And I thought, I'm sort of, for lack of a better word, I'm sort of like royalty. It's almost like the duke of--like Rufus Wainwright would be like the Prince of Wales, and I'm sort of like the duke of some county that nobody has heard of way down in the south somewhere--

PM: [laughs]

DT: --but I'm still royalty.

PM: You can't strip me of my title.

DT: I still am, and there's no way that I'm ever going to have like a real job, because it's gone too far, and I just got too much of a taste of life as an artist. I don't know what we were talking about before.

PM: [laughs] It's all really good. And I want to get to that record deal in your teens, because I don't know the story.

DT: I was a very ambitious young man. I got together an electric guitar. I got a Gretsch guitar and an AC-30 amplifier, both of which life has stripped from me, unfortunately.

PM: Really?

DT: I'd rather not talk about that.

PM: Indeed, yeah, the guitars we've lost...

DT: But I really wanted to make a mark and do something. And as much as I tried to take the country influence out of my music, and things were really popular, like all the A&R people were saying like, "You've got to hear this band, they're called Bark Market, and they're the next big thing." You haven't heard of them since, but this is what all the labels were wanting, was this kind of music. And even the Afghan Whigs, to a certain degree, were really popular, although they never really had a whole lot of melody.

PM: Right.

DT: And I was always sort of a melody guy. Even Black Sabbath has melody.

PM: Absolutely.

DT: As heavy as it is. And then the thing was, I was struggling against--the story of my record as a teenager was what I was really doing--I didn't know what I was doing, but I was making a country rock record. I mean, I had Bucky Baxter come and play steel all over the whole record, and lap steel, and pedal steel. It had really a strong country flavor to it. And the A&R guy from the label came in and said, "This is not cool. Take all that steel guitar off."

PM: Oh!

DT: "This sounds like Vince Gill." And really, I think the record would have been remembered more as a pioneering record if it had been left alone to be more of what it was, as opposed to trying to tailor it to the marketplace, which was very much about alternative rock.

PM: Right.

DT: That's my one regret about that project. But I felt very proud to be on a major label, and very proud to work with some of the really bright people in the music industry, like Bob Krasnow and T Bone Burnett, and these kind of legendary guys, and to rub shoulders with some of these guys. I felt very honored. And I carry a lot of great memories, and I learned a lot from that time.

PM: So what was T Bone like, especially to you, way back then?

DT: Well, he's got ADD to a pretty extensive degree, so he gets bored quite easily. But I remember at one point, it became a game. What could we do to this that would make T Bone interested in it?

PM: Wow.

DT: And we got very experimental one night, I remember. And Chris Feinstein was playing a bass drum with a pencil. Pat McCarthy was playing an Omnichord through an amp. Jay Joyce was playing a dobro. Matt Chamberlain was playing some kind of percussion. And I was playing this weird like ukulele of Jackson Browne's that I found like in the dumpster sort of behind his studio that he hadn't strung up or played probably since the '60s.

PM: Wow.

DT: And T Bone came in and he said, "Now, that's what I'm talking about!" And that, actually, to this day, is my favorite track on the album. And it's called "You." We really got experimental on that one.

T Bone is an artist, and he's been there, and he just doesn't have the patience to sit around and listen to the thing you've heard a million times. It's a strength and it's also a weakness, I think. But he's far more intelligent than I am. I think he was kind of letting me sort of take the reins and run the show. And then I felt so much pressure at one point I broke down and cried and said, "I feel like I can't do this by myself." And he said, "Well, I'm just so glad to know that you really care about this, and I'll really try to sort of shepherd you through this a little bit more. I've been letting you take the reins." So then, from that point on, he kind of held my hand a little bit more.

PM: Wow.

DT: But he's a really loving guy, and a very emotional guy, and a very heartfelt guy. And he also really feels music deeply. I mean, he was telling me about playing with the Rolling Thunder Review when Bob Dylan was bringing out these songs. He said that Dylan would sing "You're a Big Girl Now," and T Bone would just be in the band and he would just start crying at the songs, they were so beautiful. So he's a very emotional person, and he really feels music deeply. And that gives him--he's got the kind of sensitivity that you need to be a really great artist and great producer.

PM: Wow. And so how did life, musically and otherwise, start to unfold once the *Sweetie* project did whatever it did, or didn't do, upon--it got released, right?

DT: Well, it wasn't that it did or it didn't do anything; it was a total bomb. I mean, it was a complete disaster. And I spent so much money that basically I got blacklisted by the

labels. I mean, nobody wanted to touch me because I just had a reputation for making records over and over again, and then the end result was nothing you could sell. I was pretty much, what's the Latin term--persona non grata. So it took a while to recover from that. [*Sweetie* came out from Elektra in 1996. You can hear clips of it (and buy it) here. http://www.amazon.com/Sweetie-Daniel-Tashian/dp/B000002HH4/ref=m_art_pr_1]

Once I figured out that I was really in it for the long haul, that was a big, big thing for me, because I realized what I was really into was writing songs and doing it. And I was planning to do it and be a musician and be involved in music for the rest of my life, so I might as well just knuckle down and figure out what to do. So then I started doing some more stuff. But I went through a period of pretty deep depression about--I had an identity crisis. I went back to art school, and did a million different jobs, and a ton of things--it's a long process.

PM: Yeah.

So you play a lot of instruments and sing uncommonly well. Let's put a finger on some of the good recording projects or live tours you've been a part of, for the readership.

DT: Oh, sure. Well, one thing that was really a project that brought me back into music and sort of pulled me away from--I was working in a bookstore--was Patty Griffin's *Flaming Red* album, for which I only contributed a few songs, but it was such a kick to work with Brad Pemberton and Chris Feinstein, who are now Ryan Adams' rhythm section. And they were also the rhythm section on the *Sweetie* record.

PM: Oh, that's what happened to Feinstein...

DT: And Jay Joyce. And it was such a kick to work with those guys again. And I realized *this is what I really want to be doing*. And Patty was really encouraging of me. Jay would tell me, "Patty was really glad you were there at the studio today. She really appreciated you being there, and she liked your ideas." And that kind of made me feel encouraged, like "maybe I'm not totally untalented..."

[laughter]

DT: So that was one of those experiences, that *Flaming Red* album, that really brought me back into feeling, *hey, I want do this, and I can do this, and I do have good ideas*. Also, Mindy Smith's record. I've always been a fan of her voice, so that was kind of a thrill to me because I feel like we really got a chance to blend our voices in a great way. I felt really honored to perform with her. We got to sing together on the *Tonight Show*, which was cool.

PM: Wow, which song did you sing on the *Tonight Show*?

DT: We did a song first called "Please Stay."

PM: Oh, that's a great song.

DT: Yeah. And I'm trying to think what else.

PM: There have been less famous ones, too, that I liked a lot, like Carter Wood's amazing record.

DT: Sure, Carter Wood. Oh, I mean, that record is so good. If she made that record now--

PM: I mean, I never shut up about that record. That's a frickin' unbelievable record.

DT: And she's, you know, I mean--

PM: Where is she?

DT: Last I heard she was living in London.

PM: Because I've tried to get a handle on where Carter went.

DT: I keep thinking maybe she'll email me sometime.

PM: Yeah.

DT: But maybe I'll see her at Bread & Company.

[laughter]

PM: Any other projects come to mind before we move on?

DT: Well, Josh Rouse, for sure.

PM: Oh, yeah, right, of course.

DT: I mean, I started out as a fan. And that was one of those things where I was--and I'll never forget this because I will always do this now, but if I'm a fan of somebody, and they're within throwing distance of me, I'll reach out to them and say--like I just called Josh and said, "I love this record. I want to play with you."

PM: [laughs]

DT: And "Call me if you want me to." And he thought about it for a week or two, and he called me back and said, "Hey, I thought about what you said, and would you want to come play?" And so that kind of taught me to not be afraid to reach out to people.

PM: Right.

DT: And so the thing is, man, Josh Rouse is really an amazing songwriter and lyricist, and I learned a lot from him, about really painting a picture with the lyrics, and really letting the vocal come into the front of the mix, and really having a story to tell. And so that was a very important experience for me, the years I spent kind of in his band. And I'm not really doing that anymore, but we're great friends. We went out the other night and drank some wine and talked about old times.

PM: I just love his music to death.

DT: Yeah. I mean, he's just really a special talent. He was sort of--I don't know if you call it an Army brat or whatever, but he was kind of moved around quite a bit when he was a kid. I identify with that, with that aspect of things. And also we were both--I don't know how you would describe this, but I think that we both sort of wanted to be accepted by the preppy kids in our schools, but we were also sort of more misfits.

[laughter]

PM: Right. And so you did some recording with Josh and went on tour, right?

DT: Right.

PM: Did you also open some shows? Have I got that right?

DT: Yeah, that's right. And we've written several songs together. And those songs that we've written together are some of my favorite songs I've been involved with.

PM: Wow. Yeah, I'm crazy about him.

And for years in Nashville you hosted a rock and pop writers night for the hipster scene.

DT: That's right.

PM: Do you still do some version of that?

DT: No, I don't. We did it for five years. I was just thinking the other day--now I wake up quite early, and I'm sort of on this--well, it's sort of a routine, actually, that is really difficult to maintain if you stay up late. [laughs] And I just don't really do that so much anymore. So anyway...

PM: So what do you do early in the morning? You working out? Or are you writing pages like the Artist's Way? Or what do you like to get up early and do?

DT: It's funny you mention that. I would really like to continue that. I was doing it for a little while.

PM: I got to get back to that, yeah.

DT: It's a very great thing to do. But no, I walk my dog. And I read the paper. And I don't know what I do, but it takes me all morning to do it.

PM: Yeah, I get up at 5:30. I just love it. That's just my favorite time of day.

DT: Yeah.

PM: So let's talk about the ukulele, because you're a local champion thereof.

DT: Okay. I love to talk about the ukulele, sure.

PM: I recently saw you play solo with a ukulele at that church benefit for the Tibetan Monks, brothers known as the Kempos. And I liked that gig a lot.

DT: Well, thank you for that. I'm still refining some of these ideas. But basically, well, my neighbor is this hit country songwriter. He's had all these hits and cuts and everything. But he has a passion for the ukulele as well. And so we've actually got eight tunes written for a ukulele record.

PM: Who's that? Who is the guy?

DT: His name is Troy Verges.
http://www.umpgnashville.com/spotlight/dsp_spotlight.asp?ID=902

PM: Oh, Troy Verges, sure. [laughs]

DT: And so it's kind of exciting, because it's been a dream of mine to have a record of songs all written on the ukulele. And he's helping me make that dream come true, because I just don't have the personal fortitude to accomplish it on my own. And a friend of his, a guy named Marv Green--

PM: Oh, another great songwriter, holy shit. [<http://cdbaby.com/cd/marvgreen>]

DT: --joined in with this. And actually, the three of us wrote a really great song. This is one of the things about Nashville that I love: you can basically throw a rock from my house and hit somebody who's into the same weird stuff that you're into.

PM: Yeah, it's going to bounce off his head and hit somebody else that's into the same thing, yeah.

DT: And so it's a very productive environment for me, anyway. I can't really imagine anywhere elsewhere you could have that kind of community.

PM: And people don't understand that.

DT: But at the same time, I want to temper that by saying I really don't feel like Music Row has ever really given a whole lot of--I don't know, I just never felt like a really sympathetic vibration from the real sort of ground-level industry here. It's always been these little niches that I've tried to create outside the realm of...

And actually, I rode on a plane with Waylon Jennings shortly before he died, back from Austin. We sat next to each other. He told me, as the plane was literally hitting the ground, he leaned in and he said, "You know, I never did feel like they completely ever accepted me here."

PM: Wow.

DT: And so I don't know at what point of success I'll reach that I'll feel--you still feel a little hurt that the industry isn't more willing to try to--I don't know what they could do, but they're certainly still selling records and certainly still making money, but I'm not on their radar at all.

PM: Even at their best, the musical insiders, the Row, is so shortsighted here, that unless you're doing the very specific thing that they want you to do for them, you are just not on the program.

DT: Uh-huh.

PM: It's just that simple. It's really a shame.

DT: I remember I spent a couple weeks working on two demos where I played all the instruments, and really made these beautiful songs. And then I took them into a publisher, and the guy was like, "No, I think I'd just rather have a guitar vocal."

PM: And if you brought in that, he would have said the other thing. "I can't sell guitar vocals."

DT: But I've decided now to just do my thing and maybe if this record catches fire a little bit and it opens some doors for me, and even if we get the opportunity to make another one, I may not have to suck up to these hillbillies.

PM: Absolutely not. No, I don't think that that's in the cards for you, sucking up to the hillbillies, I don't think that's how it's going to happen.

So about the uke--do you tune it regular tuning, or do you use other tunings? How do you approach it?

DT: I tune it in standard ukulele tuning, which is [singing] "My dog has fleas."

PM: Right.

Do you have any TV or film scoring in your background?

DT: Well, I've had a couple songs in soap operas and short films and things like that. Oh, and there's this film out now with Jeff Goldblum in it called *Pittsburgh*, that actually has several Silver Seas songs in it.

PM: Wow. How did that happen?

DT: Well, it was sort of an inside deal. I've always been a fan of Jeff Goldblum.

PM: Hell yeah.

DT: And he was producing this film himself about his efforts to get his girlfriend a visa, and how he went back to his hometown of Pittsburgh to star in the Broadway production of sort of a small town play, a Broadway production of *The Music Man*.

PM: Oh, Lord.

DT: So anyway, the thing was, the attorney for the Seas--this is really boring--was representing that project, or producing that project, and said, "Why don't you get these guys?" So it kind of was an inside job. But I think the music really gave the film a lot of lift and a lot of energy, and it ended up being a good call.

PM: Wow. So before we get on to the record *High Society*, what is the solo CD featured on your myspace page, and is it available?
<http://www.myspace.com/danieltashian>

DT: Yeah. That's *The Lovetest*, which was this hilarious thing. I don't know where these songs came from, but they just sort of appeared one day. It was just a vision of a sound. It was really influenced by the New Radicals, which I was very--I actually still maintain that the best song that came out between 1990 and 2000, in ten years, the best single song was "You Get What You Give."

PM: Ah, I heard that in Blockbuster just the other day. [laughs]

DT: I mean, just the energy of that song and the sound of it, it just can't be matched. [Here's a clip of "You Get What You Give" by The New Radicals.] I mean, I defy anyone to name me a better song that came out between 1990 and 2000--not country, or--

PM: Right, but in that field.

DT: In that genre. I've also heard that Joni Mitchell said the same thing, so I don't think that I'm alone.

PM: Really?

DT: But that guy has proven that he's--Gregg Alexander has proven he's not a flash in the pan, he's had several hit songs since. But the energy of that song, I really related to that. I don't know what it was. It had to do with, for me, making a decision about my life and what the purpose of being here for me was. And so out of kind of siphoning a little bit of that energy off into a project of my own is what resulted in *The Lovetest*.

PM: Wow. Amazing.

DT: And it's not out. And I just recently got the songs back. They were owned by an evil corporation for a while.

PM: Really? How did you get them back?

DT: I got them back because my lawyer was very savvy and enabled me to get them back.

PM: What a guy.

DT: So I'm trying to decide what I'm going to do with those, because, I mean, I don't really perform them. I did do a couple performances of them, but it's like you really got to get in shape to do these songs, because they're all written on the piano, and my piano chops are not really--anyway, I don't know what I'm going to do with it. My dream would be if somebody took the stuff and--that'll never happen. It's always--people always talk about, "I just need to get my stuff to film and TV." Really, the only way anything happens is if you really get out there and work on something.

PM: Yeah. But at least that should be available.

DT: Well, yeah, I think so. I've got to figure out--I mean, any ideas you have about how to make it available, please, I'm all ears.

PM: Okay. I'll have to think about that. So thanks for all the information on Tashian himself. It's hard to get that stuff. Because I'm one of the many people that are interested. Let's get on to the Silver Seas and *High Society*.

DT: Okay.

PM: Is this the second record from the group?

DT: That's right.

PM: So what's the first one, and will that be available or--

DT: Well, the first one was called *Starry Gazey Pie*. And it came out in 2001. And let's see, *Starry Gazey Pie*, that was our first record. It's currently--I don't know if it's

available. I think you get it. You can get it on iTunes and you can get it on CDBaby, I think. [<http://cdbaby.com/cd/bees>]

PM: Okay, good. [You'll find a couple of clips from it on our Listen page.]

So this record here, *High Society*, those are all your songs, right?

DT: That's right--well, a couple co-writes with Jason Lehning.

PM: Right. And the songs draw freely and liberally from your many American pop sources from the '70s and beyond. Would you call that accurate?

DT: Yeah, yeah.

PM: It's not really outlandish to call it "soft rock" in a lot of spots, is it?

DT: No, no. And that's really what I love.

PM: That's what I love. I'm a closet soft rock guy.

DT: I was talking to Josh Rouse about this the other night. And we decided, really, it all comes back to Christine McVie.

PM: [laughs]

DT: Because really, she was the one, if you think about it--and it's really interesting, in Fleetwood Mac, how like the really blissful pop sound that you equate with Fleetwood Mac, it's her. A lot of it has to do, too, with Lindsay Buckingham's guitar sound. But when Lindsay sings, it's not really blissful, it's more rock.

PM: Oh, yeah, he's much more angst-y.

DT: Yeah, he's angst-y. And same thing with--and as wonderful a voice as Stevie Nicks has, and she is a terrific singer, really, it's Christine that had--you know, [singing] "When the loving starts and the lights go down"--and these songs that are just these really blissed-out melodies, and that's what I really responded to as a child. *Rumors* was a huge record in our house.

PM: Oh, yeah.

DT: Constantly spinning. [Let's hear a clip of Christine and Fleetwood Mac doing "Say You Love Me".]

PM: And *High Society* being a soft rock record--and I'm tickled to see that you love that as I do--it's very mass-media friendly. Although the radio today is in its peculiar state, still, soft rock rules, and it shows up everywhere in the culture.

DT: Yeah. Well, I'm glad you say that. We're going to add a few other touches to the next project we do, but even this one--it's those layers and that sound and really a melody that's kind of exciting.

PM: Yeah, absolutely, it's about a groove and a melody, every time. And I hope that *High Society* is getting shopped heavily to TV. I mean, TV is breaking so many artists now.

DT: That would be great.

PM: Somebody is on that, I assume?

DT: Well, let's see, yeah, I would assume so. I think the label, they've got some of the best and brightest people in the industry that are thinking of pitches.

PM: Forward thinkers, yeah.

DT: My thing, Frank, a dream, would be a sitcom theme.

PM: Well, just what I was about to say, I think the title song alone deserves its own movie or TV show.

DT: That would be great.

PM: There, I said it, there should be a frickin' movie or a show called *High Society*.

DT: Yeah. Well, that would be great. Anyway, that would be my dream. So if you know anybody who is starting a sitcom--and actually, it almost happened to my dad. He had a song called "Mr. Sunshine" that he wrote in the '70s. And apparently the guy who was on *Three's Company*, John Ritter, right before he died he was working on a sitcom called *Mr. Sunshine*, and he was going to use that song.

PM: Oh, my God.

DT: That would have been great for my dad, but...

PM: What a drag.

DT: The song is very--it's got that thing--what's that song "Welcome Back"--

PM: John Sebastian.

DT: John Sebastian is the man. I mean, that guy is my hero.

PM: And he hadn't made diddley on all those great songs. The first thing that bought him a house and set him up was *Welcome Back Kotter*.

DT: Yeah, well good for him, he deserved it.

PM: Yeah, because he signed them all away.

DT: It happened to those guys, those older guys. I'm sorry to hear that. But I mean, damn, what are you going do? You can't--

PM: You just got to keep writing a song, playing a song, what are you going do?

You're a guy with your finger on the pulse of any number of things. So before we get off, I want to see if you'll say anything about the crazy state of the music business, or where you think it's going, or any of that stuff.

DT: I can only speak from experience, but I can say that people love music, and that they love records, and they love things that have depth and soul. And I think that the desire for new songs to describe new feelings is always there. I mean, as the world changes we have new emotions and new feelings, and we need new songs to describe the way people feel now, or reinterpreting old songs. So I think the need for songs will always be there as long as there is humanity on the planet. It's a very primal need that people have for songs that express what they feel and the lives they live. I think people put themselves in the shoes of the singer. When they hear a song they like to think, "This is a song I could sing to someone that I love," or, "This is a song that says how I feel about this." People need those vehicles for their emotions. So I think, for songwriters, the outlook looks good. I think for models that don't really have any talent, but they're just sort of poster people for something else, I don't know, it might be a little bit dicey.

PM: [laughs]

DT: Forgive me if I'm elaborating too much here--

PM: You couldn't for me.

DT: I think prospects are good. I also think it's just really interesting. I wish I could make a prediction, but the only thing I feel certain of is that people constantly need new songs. And I buy records. I can't wait for a record from an artist that I really love--like Feist--for it to come out. There are careers that are really happening. And people that were really on the skids for a while and nothing was happening with them and they're having these amazing comeback tours, like Crowded House, and bands like that. I mean, 10 years ago Crowded House played at 328 [a defunct Nashville venue] and just barely had enough people in there, and now they're packing the Ryman and getting a standing ovation before they play a note. So sometimes it takes a while before the culture really appreciates things. But it will get it eventually if you just keep hammering at it.

[laughter]

DT: Anyway, that's my philosophy.

PM: Well, I'm glad you continue to hammer away. You're certainly one of my favorite players out there.

DT: Oh, thank you, Frank. Thank you always for your encouragement and support.

PM: You bet. It's great to talk this way today. We wish you the best of luck with *High Society*. I'm sure it's really good to do great things.

DT: Oh, I hope so. Thank you for that. All right, take care, Frank.