

Oh Danny Boy, The Music Is A Calling

by Joey Stuckey

If you love percussion like me, then you know that there has been a bit of a void for the past 15-years. If I could see - and I can't - I would say that much of the music, let alone percussion of late, has been a bit "beige". So, imagine my delight when I found out about the new project from legendary percussionist Danny Seraphin. If I could see, I would say that suddenly there was an explosion of color!!!

If you don't know Danny well, let me fill you in. At age 9, he started playing the drums. At 15, he hit the road with a group. In 1967, he founded one of the most beloved bands in musical history. Drummer extraordinaire Danny Seraphin began a legacy called Chicago Transit Authority or more often referred to simply as "Chicago."

In 1990, Danny was let go from the super-group that he founded. He hid away from music for some fifteen years, but I say to you - rejoice, the man is back and better than ever!

His new project, CTA or *California* Transit Authority and their debut "Full Circle" gives Chicago devotees something to smile about with his amazing new renditions of classic Chicago tunes like "25 or 6 to 4" and "Make Me Smile". There is also something for jazz-heads like myself like the remarkable version of the classic Cannonball Adderley tune "Something Different". This song described by Seraphin as "challenging" has quickly become the group's signature piece.

Another treasure is the amazing version of "Dreams" the guys came up with. If you are a fan of the most popular version as performed by the Allman Brothers then you will not be disappointed for the new CTA version has that great southern blues feel, but with the punch of horns - very reminiscent of the first Chicago albums with the added bonus of Larry's unique vocal stylings.

Danny's new project really is full circle. In the early days, Danny was one of the fathers of what we now call fusion - a blending of rock and jazz. However, as you can see, Chicago moved away from its fusion roots and moved into the world of pop music during the 80's and later recordings. With *Full Circle*, the sound is fusion again and while they don't sound like Seraphin's first super group, they are well on the way to being his second with a fresh sound and really passionate playing which has been his trademark from the start.

These new arrangements - and the idea for the personnel for the band were born out of a celebrity benefit jam session to help *Modern Drummer* photographer Lissa Wells with medical expenses.

After this fated jam session and a touching phone call from six-time Emmy winner, keyboardist, and long-time friend Peter Fish asking Danny to promise to be in a band with him "before he died", the fire and passion for music was rekindled in Danny's heart!

Danny put together this “band of bands” for the benefit and then took the boys into the studio for a recording you must have!

The band features world class lead guitarist Mark Bonilla with the rest of the guitar chores falling to Mike Wallace, rock-solid bassist Mick Mahan, and Ed Roth and Peter Fish on keys. The band is rounded out by the power house of Larry Bragg’s vocals which you might have heard most recently pumping out tunes for Tower of Power. Behold, the new CTA was born!

When asked if the band name CTA was a deliberate moniker to remind fans of the Chicago days, Danny said that it really was more about remembering the music that he loved to play and looking at the old Chicago tunes in a new light, while at the same time it was a way to reclaim some of his rightful legacy taken, when Danny and Chicago parted ways.

It’s an amazing recording! I have always listened to Chicago and known of Danny, but what I never realized until the opportunity of this interview came is what an impact Danny has had on generations of drummers.

As I started doing my research for the interview, I began to see Danny’s name listed everywhere as an influence by most of today’s top drummers. Of course, this was not news to Don Lombardi, founder and president of DW Drums, another friend that encouraged Danny to get back on the throne. ☺

However, don’t think that just because Seraphin wasn’t drumming he wasn’t busy! During his drumming hiatus, as a resident of Denver, Colorado, he started a theatrical company producing for Broadway and off Broadway.

Seraphin laughingly says that he became a Broadway producer by signing his name to a check. Whether that’s true or not, he and his production company did some very cool work with Mr. Theater himself, Andrew Lloyd Webber. Seraphin also worked with a host of other theatrical big wigs like Mitchell Maxwell of “*Stomp*” fame and Waxman and Williams - the gals that did the most recent version of “*Phantom of the Opera*.”

However, while that’s all cool, the big news for fans of Seraphin’s drumming is that the guys in CTA will be touring a lot and starting on the next record soon thereafter. While their first offering “*Full Circle*” has mostly new arrangements of old favorites, Danny says that the next project will have more fully original songs along with a few more Chicago remakes. Sadly, when I asked Danny what the remaining musicians of Chicago thought of him revisiting their classics with the new group, it was all too clear that they weren’t that pleased about it. I say, guys, if you get a royalty check, just chill out! Like it or not though, Seraphin is back and better than ever! Oh Danny boy, we love you so!