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## Mick Dalla-Vee



I'd been wanting to interview this ever so talented man since he was made known to me last year, and finally the opportunity arose. I hope that you will find him as interesting as we here at Linear Reflections did, not only is Mick extremely busy with a number of different projects, but he has turned a personal tragedy into something for the betterment of society. In getting to know him, I can only say that I have come to admire him even more. Mick is the owner of Millennia Sound Design, where he is a producer, he is also a solo and band musician (Cease and Desist), founder of The Carolyn Foundation, and until recently a member of the

board of the Pacific Music Industry Association. I'm still not certain how he managed, but Mick found the time to fit us in, and was a delight to interview!

NdB: You seem to have a number of irons in the fire (Millennia SoundDesign,Singer/Songwriter, Producer, Solo and Band Musician, Pacific Music Industry Association, and the Carolyn Foundation. Within which area do you most identify with?

MDV: Wow, this is a question that involves a lot of detail... here goes...

Playing live has been my main source of bread and butter for years, and although I still immensely enjoy that, this little enterprise called "Millennia Sound Design" has taken me over. I've worked in many studios over the years, and found that it wouldn't take me

long to catch on to what was going on "behind the scenes" as it were. During the recording process I always had a feeling, that if given good equipment, I could get the job done as good or better than the people in the control seats. I have had the opportunity over the years to write, play, and be at least part of the creative process with some of the most talented people in the business, and it rubs off via osmosis, I guess. [laughs] Building this studio's been a bit of a dream. I guess that's my main focus now along with my song writing.

I'm constantly getting new artists approaching me for help, stating they have heard what Millennia Sound Design did for so and so, and would I be interested in working with them. It's fun. I try to make it fun. I almost always hated being in the studio in the past, due to the "stiffness" of the people recording me, or what-have-you. Millennia Sound Design will always try to not be "that." I think music is fun and entertainment. That

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Design will always try to not be that. I think music is fun and entertainment. That should come across on the recording as well.

During my time on the PMIA (Pacific Music Industry Association), I became instrumental (at first with province critic and then PMIA president, Tom Harrison) in forming "Celebrate" which was to be a series to celebrate the works of some of western Canada's "unsung heroes." Tom had to resign at the outset, due to health concerns, which left the ball totally in my court, and which was quite exhaustive. The work I did for that actually got the PMIA "their day" as dedicated by Vancouver City Hall.

The first (and unfortunately) only recipient of Celebrate, so far, was Gaye Delorme, for all the great work he has done over the years. When I contacted Gaye, he had just come through an awful time of really bad health, the result of which leaving him all but blind, along with other complications. When I stopped by his house to pick up research materials, on a whim I asked him if he would like to come out and play with me on Wednesday nights at this little house "solo" gig I had, and he said that he would like that... he hadn't played in quite a while. We became pretty fast friends during the time of putting together the "Celebrate" show for him at the Arts Club Theatre. He requested at the time that proceeds from the show go to the "Hearts and Soul Foundation," another very worthy cause chaired by Ken Glaze, vice president of HeliJet <http://www.hearts-and-soul.org/>

The amount of work Gaye has done is incredible, from writing the notorious "Rodeo Song," to "Earache My Eye" for Cheech and Chong, to scoring their movies, and on and on. He is a fantastic guitarist at all levels of play from rock to blues to flamenco... amazing! It was wild receiving calls at my home from "Cheech" Marin and Tommy Chong during the development of the show. I wished I was back in high school again...[laughs] The guys in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario (where I'm originally from) wouldn't believe it!!!!

Gaye, since then, has actually used Millennia Sound Design to produce some young artists as well. He has accredited me with bringing him out of his health-induced retirement. He's playing all over the place again, and recently has done TV shows on the east coast... It feels good!

Unfortunately, the PMIA felt that they had to cut back on what issues they would take on, and "Celebrate" was the first to go... although, I have to say it DID NOT lose money. In fact we were able to give "Hearts and Soul" a healthy cheque after all the numbers were crunched. I was very proud of my efforts. [As he pats himself squarely on the back - and laughs yet again]

**\*\*Note:** I recently resigned my chair at the PMIA

I've always loved entertaining. Music was great therapy for me as a teenager. I'm sure the fact that I learned how to play guitar at age 10 -11 after my mom died of cancer was profound. Although I came from a big wonderful, fantastic family, I was a pretty lonely kid... not outwardly so much as the inwardly. I still feel like that, and usually counter-act that by being loud and boisterous. People always laugh when I tell them that I'm actually very shy...I just counteract it with the opposite.

Now for the Carolyn Foundation...(whew).

I went to work one Tuesday night (November 16th, 1999) and as I left, my daughter, Carolyn, kissed me on the cheek, told me she loved me and that she would see me in the morning. She had just moved back home to get out of debt and go to school to become a nurse. She finally knew what she wanted to be. The kiss and the "I love you" were just part and parcel of Carolyn's personality. She always said that you never knew what could happen, and she always wanted the last thing for anybody to hear from her was I love you. If we were arguing over the phone, she would get an "I love you" in before she hung up on me. [laughs] What a character! She was painfully so right. I've tried to make "I Love You" my baby's legacy.

The next day we found she had died in her sleep, the result of mistakenly mixing wrong medications.

Now what?

Aside from the profound emotional impact this caused (and continues to cause - our lives, literally will never be the same, and we keep suffering the fall out from it to this day), financially I would have been ruined. You can never prepare for such a thing. It's the old line... "Your kids are supposed to succeed you!" Regardless, we had nothing in the way of financial backup for this kind of tragedy. I couldn't work... musicians only make money when they work - we were really in a tough spot. I would have to sell the house.

Luckily, I play with 2 very splendid people in our band "Cease and Desist," Brent Howard and Marc Lafrance. They immediately got to work putting together a benefit for my family. What a benefit it was! I couldn't now possibly name everyone who played that night (I was still an emotional wreck at the time), however, I'll try. (If you're reading this and I've left you out, please forgive me) Loverboy, Stonebolt, Trama, Jeff Neill (from Streetheart fame), Chris Trigg, Chris Bradley and a whole bunch of others. The guys in my band, Marc and Brent, opened the show with Mike Norman on sax and keys, Steve Sousy on keys and Lee Wordon playing my stand up bass for the occasion. Kevin

Hayes from ROCK 101 in Vancouver had the radio station get their sponsors to put together a whole bunch of prizes and auction items and he was the MC for the night as well. Amazing. Loverboy, of course, closed the show.

Some of your readers may know that Scott Smith (bass player for Loverboy) was lost at sea last year when his sailboat had an accident in a storm off the coast of San Francisco. Ironically, he had cancelled a sailboat trip and flew back to Vancouver to play that benefit for us. Bless you Scott, and have a great journey. Amazing people this music business has!

That benefit kept us afloat, and allowed us to do a lot of things in the aftermath of losing Carolyn. We were, first and foremost, able to pay for the funeral. Considering she died on the upper floor of our house (a place where my wife Joanne couldn't go any more), it also allowed us to renovate the upstairs area while Joanne, my son Carman, and myself, went to Puerto Vallarta for a week. I went back to work New Years Eve. My wife went back to her part time job in May.

At the benefit, sound engineer Randy Issac (who now sits on The Carolyn Foundation board) mentioned to Brent Howard how great the benefit was. Randy got to thinking that, in a twisted way, I was a lucky guy, for having so many musicians and people rally support for us. He said, "It makes you wonder what would happen if Mick wasn't so popular a guy..." or something to that effect. Out of that conversation, a seed was planted for The Carolyn Foundation. It was a way of keeping my daughter's name immortalized (immensely important to me - Carolyn was immensely proud of what I did for a living. She had no musical talent herself at all, which bothered her quite a bit), while doing great service to the musical community that had given so generously to us. There are no assistance plans in place for musicians in a tragic situation. The Carolyn Foundation is now there to try to help with some of the burden. We've had recipients already, so it is working. I'm very proud of what our little foundation has achieved in a relatively short amount of time. Mark Dobinson and Whitney-John Stuart of "bandFEST" (a local, and soon to be Canada wide, battle of the bands organization <http://www.bandfest.ca/>) have adopted The Carolyn Foundation as their charity of choice. Very gracious of them, and they have raised most of the money that the foundation has so far.

NdB: The Carolyn Foundation seems so unique. Is it based on, or do you know of any other foundations that are similar?

MDV: A person from the US, who sits on a board set up by the "Grammy's" in the States, which is similar to The Carolyn Foundation, has contacted me. Her name is Chanda Rankin and their foundation is called MusiCares (<http://www.grammy.com/academy/musicares/index.html>). She has expressed interest in helping us out. If you look at their web site and ours, it's pretty obvious we have to go a long way to get even a percentage of the financial resources they have.

NdB: Can you explain your feelings on each of the roles you play:

SINGER -

MDV: When I do other artists' songs live (read: covers), I try to "nail" the singers vocal characteristics, so that the audience stays familiar with the particular song. I find that to be a not-to-difficult (for me and most of my cronies anyway), yet worthwhile thing to do. It teaches you other people's approach, and helps in the entertainment value of the song. Other artists have done this for years. "Lady Madonna" by The Beatles, is Paul McCartney doing his "Elvis" as is Freddie Mercury in Queen's "Crazy Little Thing Called Love." Billy Joel did "Frankie Valli" in his "Uptown Girl." In all these songs, I'm sure these vocals were inspired by their days as "cover" artists doing their "cover" voices. By the way, it seems like everybody and his dog in the testosterone music scene these days is still trying to sound like Eddie Vedder. I mean... at first it was cute, know what I mean? [laughs]

If I may add something, I've been meaning to say something to you "artist snobs" out there... I've heard this waaay too much about bands doing "cover" material. People who perform their own music "exclusively" have too many times had this opinion of "oh, they're JUST a cover band" when referring to cover artists. That always makes me laugh. Please try to understand that being a good cover band isn't a piece of cake. It's very hard work, and I dare say, that most musicians in a good cover band kick the asses of most musicians' in their "original bands" (whatever that means - is anything original any more?) Please, I'm talking about full time cover bands, not "weekend" outfits -- like "Joe and the Incredible Flying Wedding Singers". I would use on the Vancouver side, The Roxy's "Dr. Strangelove" and Vancouver Island's "Wonderbread" as great examples of incredible talent "nailing" cover music.

There, I've said it - and I mean it. You think learning other peoples songs verbatim is easy Mr./Miss /Mrs. /Ms. Artist? PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE... try it before you cut it down. Just appreciate that everyone is playing music, whether it is his or her own, or somebody else's. People make choices. It's their choice. I've done most. All music styles are pain-staking when/if done right. There's a whole lot less shitty cover bands than there are shitty "original" bands. Think about it... cover bands have the best writers in the world working for them. [laughs]

Anyway, now that I've pissed off some of you and made others laugh and yet others cry a resounding "hurray," may I just say to everyone here that music is a beautiful thing. Appreciate everybody's efforts, even if it's not your cup of tea, as they used to say. To do ANY style of music well is very hard and requires hard work. Ever hear a heavy metal drummer try to do a legitimate polka? (Not that he'd want to - actually - that's very funny! Imagine a heavy thrash polka band!!!! They probably have at least one in L.A. I'm going next month...I'll report back [grin]) Ever hear a traditional jazz guy do thrash? They think it's easy, but they can't do it!

SONGWRITER -

MDV: Hmmm - my feelings on song writing. If I may quote Billy Joel on this.... "Nobody hates the act of sitting down to write a song more than I do, however, nobody gloats more when it is done." I'm paraphrasing from an interview I read years ago, but, in

some ways it sums it up for me... sort of. I guess it's just that I'm such a fan of other people's work, that I find it difficult to think that my ideas are just as valid as say, Sting's, ya know? Regardless, I've been successful with my writing, so I must be doing something right.

If the question really means how I do it? Can't tell ya! [laughs] It's not that I'm hiding trade secrets; it's just that it's different every time. I've had songs literally write themselves, I've ripped off people (not the end result - just to get the ideas flowing) ... anyway, please read on - I'm flowing now... [laughs]

It's always different. They say if you're writing a novel, you define your characters first in great detail; how they talk, dress, where they live etc. If you do this enough, the story will write itself. You'll know which person had the motivation to pull the trigger, because you'll know that person inside out. You'll also know if the police sergeant will be a cross dresser on the weekends. Songs don't ever have to be in that great a detail, however, I do believe the process is the same.

Another trick is to make believe you're somebody else, which can be fun. "I'm Don Henley and today I'm going to write my new hit, Long Lonesome Highway" ...or "I'm Elvis Costello and I'm going to write my new hit, The Girl I Never Knew."

Sometimes, a relatively new instrument can inspire you. I've written on a lot of different things (excluding bagpipes, but I'm sure a day will come lassie)... sometimes just the knowledge of other songs you carry with you on your main instrument can inhibit you, I guess. There's ways around that, though...

Let every idea you have enter the picture and write them down, or in some way, make note of them immediately. Don't edit during this part of the process. You'll be caught dead in your tracks immediately if you do. Let it all come out...even the shitty and the bubblegum. You'd be surprised how a bubblegum or blatantly plagiarized lyric or melody can sound amazing and refreshing by going back to front with it during your "editing" process.

Example... grab your axe... I'll wait...

You have an idea that goes say: A/C#m/G/Bm

You're thinking that's "Lay Lady Lay" by Bob Dylan and you may have stopped it dead in its tracks. However, if you had just let it flow and written it down, you could go almost back to front with it later. Say for this song you wanna keep the idea starting in "A," so instead you go... A/Bm/G/C#m... maybe the C#m sounds awful here. Try the relative major then so: A/Bm/G/E

With a little tweaking to your vocal line, you have rewritten "Lay, Lady Lay," and nobody will know where you got the idea. All writers do this at one time or another, I believe.

Sometimes songs come from the cosmos - usually after beating your head over some other crappy ideas - On my Christmas CD from a few years back (A Whistler Christmas - Mick Dalla-Vee) "All I Want is You at Christmastime" literally wrote itself as did "It's Snowing Christmastime Out There," but, in both cases, I was trying to finish a song I had started as a kid. Neither song sounds even remotely similar to each other or to the idea that "inspired" it. They sound like different writers even! That original idea remains unfinished to this day. In most cases, however, writing is simply doing the "sweat it out" routine.

You may squash an idea inadvertently, because it sounds foreign to you. Would it sound better with the opposite sex singing it? Don't let your ideas fall by the wayside without asking yourself all possibilities first.

I've written songs that I'd forgotten about. I've brought out old tapes and said "Wow -

where did this come from?!" Obviously, an idea I thought was shitty at the time, but in retrospect I loved.

"Another Lifetime" was a co-write with Jeff Neill (Streetheart, Jimmy Barnes band). I had the song kicking around for 10 years. I thought it was sort of a "Take it to the Limit (Eagles)" or "If You Don't Know Me By Now" type of song, but I was trying to force it into being a different song... therefore, I had no melody ideas that I liked for the verses. Jeff heard the verses and immediately did an "Al Green" type of melody and it was a "EUREKA" time. After that, it wrote itself. The rest of it is just as I had it, but I wasn't letting it be a "soul" song, which is what it was. The intro, chords, chorus, and verse chords, I had sitting in the back of my mind for 10 years. I still think the song will be a huge hit, as soon as the right person hears it. It has a timeless quality to it.

Hopefully all this will help. Just use the "KISS" method (as in most things except quantum physics). Try to have no more than 3 main musical ideas in a song. People want to enjoy music they don't wanna be educated.

PRODUCER -

MDV: All I can say here is, I strive to be a producer that allows the artist's natural abilities to shine through. It was such a faux pas when the Dixie Chicks exclaimed, at their awards acceptance speech, that they were so grateful their producer, unlike most, let them play their own instruments on their album. I thought the Nashville machine would come crashing down over that one! The Ryman Auditorium almost fell over and choked out Junior Samples!

"Is that why every \$%#@#\$%@ song that's recorded in Nashville sounds the same?" people asked... "You mean our favourite artists don't play their own instruments on their CD 's we buy?" the fans cried...

No Virginia, there is no Santa Claus...

That being said, I'm so sick of "the session player" attitude that is so prevalent. I believe a good producer gets the best from the players in the band the producer's actually "supposed" to be recording. Most producers act like booking agents these days (and they have for years - remember Phil Spector?). The money goes from the band's pockets into the hands of "Producer's" favourite musician's, so that he can get "his sound" on his clients CD. Whose project is this? Granted, there is a time and places for using great session players, but ideally, try to get the best out of the players on hand first. A good producer will make sure that the band does serious pre-production (read: intense rehearsals to tape) before setting foot in the "big" studio. It's rumoured that because of Aerosmith's intense work ethic on pre-production, Steven Tyler did "Janie's Got a Gun" in one take using a Shure SM-58 at Vancouver's now defunked Little Mountain with just 2 small punches. If you think that would be easy to do, try to sing that song (unless you don't do "covers") from beginning to end (on tape - live in a nightclub doesn't count) with perfect pitch, phrasing and intensity. That's homework done perfectly! Remember, they didn't have that clever little Antares Pitch Corrector back then.

ENGINEER -

MDV:"Make it sound like an acid trip, dude!"

Get the best sounds humanly possible with what you have to work with. The Beatles did Sgt. Pepper on 4 tracks, as most people know. Sir George Martin gets a lot of credit. Engineer, Geoff Emerick deserves at least as much credit to be able to pull such a feat off. Remember, this was at a time when most albums were recorded in minutes not hours. The Beatles 1st album in late 1963, was done in about 500 minutes (basically

over a 12 hour period in one day). 4 years later (1967) Sgt. Peppers was done in 585 hours! They were breaking totally new ground at that time, and it was Geoff's job to get great sounds for Sir George (using room mic placements, baffles, headphones wired backwards into makeshift microphones shoved up the bells of saxes, using Leslie speakers inside of organs for voices, getting the board to make "good" distortion while "redlining" it for an effect - to name just a few), and his uncanny ability to retain the high quality of those sounds as they were bounced and re-bounced, and re-bounced again and again, that makes the whole project so amazing. That's what the engineer does. Realizes the artist's/ producer's aural dreams.

"Make it sound like an acid trip, dude!"

"What kind of acid" says the engineer.

NdB: What are your thoughts on the West Coast music scene?

MDV: As I have discussed with Marc Lafrance (my fellow band mate and president of The Pacific Music Industry Association), the west coast is headed for an unprecedented level of success, which, I believe, will be much larger than the "Seattle" scene of the late

80's early 90's. We're talking huge!!!! Pray, chant, meditate that our dollar stays low. That in itself is attracting attention here, and when they start arriving and witnessing the talent here, they may not leave until each and every one of us is successful!

As Canada will come to realize, and so will the BC government, there's a lot of money to be made on the music talent here in this beautiful little province. There's nothing better out there. It's all here. We just need to support each other. Buy each other's CD's and for God's sake, listen to them too!

Canada's got one problem. We don't think our talent means anything unless the US says it does. Then we buy it - and oddly enough, we're proud of it. Take Shania, Sarah, Bryan... almost everybody. You must think of the artists out there in the Canadian trenches, working hard to sell one lousy CD to you.

Canadian's still use America's Billboard charts as their music bible. It's biased! It's by the US for the US!

Go forth and buy BC product!

By the way, my opinions on this subject are squarely based more in the country field than anywhere else. I know of a band (which will remain nameless) that had two or three #1 country hits on Canadian radio a few years ago from their album. NUMBER 1'S!!!! They sold less than 2000 copies of that album. That's Canadian's support of Canadian country music in a nutshell. Recently another Canadian country artist was dumped by his major label. Guess why? Only sold 500 copies! We're not talking garbage music here, folks!

The Canadian rock fans DO support Canadian rock acts whether they are big in the States or not. One only has to look as far as The Tragically Hip to see genuine Canadian Superstars totally "Made in Canada." That's the way it should be... ALWAYS!

The British Isles has supported their artists all along, as has Australia. Canada's close proximity to the US has made that a problem, I'm afraid. That's why there are the CRTC rulings. If we didn't have them, our stations would just play what their US counterparts do. Why? Cuz most of the population of Canada is right along the border.

Don't be a sheep any more. Buy BC product and request it on your radio stations!

Be certain that your doing this will improve your future, no matter who you are and what your line of work is in Western Canada!

what your line of work is in western Canada.

Article by: Naomi "NAT" De Bruyn

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Related Link: <http://www.millenniasounddesign.com>

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