

## Dan Silljer - Foolish Heart February 2012

Hanging out with local musicians was a sure-fire way for left-handed guitarist **Dan Silljer** to secure his place in Regina's flourishing music scene. Not surprising that local hero Jason Plumb plucked Silljer to be for his own backing band, The Willing. A musician's musician, Silljer's versatile and ambling playing style has kept him busy as Regina's best-kept secret.

As Plumb started to expand his label roster it made sense to look within his own band for potential inductees. SoccerMom Records will release Silljer's debut solo venture, ***Foolish Heart***, on the same day as Plumb and two other band-mate's albums hit the streets. Although the group of Regina's finest might seem like they are all cut from the same pop-friendly cloth, Silljer's solo work is a fusion of old-style rhythm and blues with a touch of modern rock, jazz, and soul.

Growing up, the Silljer household was full of music. His parents were musicians and involved in the 60s blue scene, so blues has always been a baseline for him musically. "Everything is derived from blues. Blues is almost like a springboard into other styles, like soul or R&B. You make the obvious transitions from blues to rock, from blues to jazz, and to fusion."

In a roundabout fashion he worked back to his roots. "I listened to Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin and went backwards into the blues," Silljer explained. At 19 he picked up his first guitar and became a part of Regina's growing music scene. Along the way, the Dan Silljer Band was born and toured as Serena Ryder's backing band for two years. He's played with Regina legend Jack Semple, the late Toronto bluesman Jeff Healey, and countless other great Canadian musicians. Only fitting that he finally step into the spotlight with his own music. "It's about time!"

From the first few organ notes on the opening track, "All But Over You," it's clear that *Foolish Heart* isn't exactly a traditional rhythm and blues album. It is steeped in good old southern soul, playful modern pop, and blues guitar bravado — all wrapped up with a touch of brassy goodness. His cover of the 1974 hit "How Long?" by one-hit wonder Ace is a jazzier jammed-out version of the sleepy single. He also breathes new life into "Strange Relationship" by Prince and "Them Changes" by Buddy Miles. "People seem excited to classify what I do," he said. "But, it's not really one thing."

"I have a solid foundation in blues, but it's not where I've ended up. I started branching out. What you hear is the result of my alternate tastes." A firm believer in interpretation, Silljer has a knack for taking a song and enhancing it. He calls it adding his own unique sonic template. "You only have 12 notes that you can play. That's it. The real difference is the colours with which you paint your painting. You want to thank the people who've come before you, but you don't want to completely emulate them. I have expanded my voice so that I don't just sound like a blues singer. But, I do want to acknowledge and tip my hat to the influences I've had."

When it came time to write the original songs for the album, Silljer had a bit of a learning curve. He had hundreds of pieces of songs, but nothing that resembled a polished song. "I wasn't really a songwriter until I met Jason. I had tried, but of all of the years of sitting down and coming up with nothing was discouraging."

Known for his songwriting prowess, Plumb worked with Silljer on pulling it all together. "I've been a fan of Jason's songwriting for a really long time. He taught me how to get the songs out, stop editing myself, trust what I am doing, and to listen from different angles. I had all of puzzle pieces, but no clue how to put it together. Jason showed me how to pull it all together."

Silljer also learned the importance of song structure. “Anybody can write a hook, but making it a song is the real trick. Jason has that down to an art. His arrangements are fantastic. He taught me to put more importance on melody, which I hadn’t done before.”

“Making this happen was a blast, entertaining, and stressful. Everything that I knew it was going to be. It’s a good example of hard work and a lot of collaboration. Blood, sweat, and tears from a great songwriter — Jason. Not to say that I didn’t put any effort in there,” he laughs.

As *Foolish Heart* is released, Silljer has realized a dream. “Now I can actually call myself a songwriter.”

### **Acclaim**

“One of Silljer’s specialties is rearranging covers songs to the point that they sound like his own originals. In fact, guests at his show at McNally’s will need keen ears to detect the difference between Silljer’s own tunes and his covers.” — Erin Harde, *Regina Leader-Post*

“Dan continues to impress and amaze audiences with his command over the guitar.” — Regina Delta Blues Association

“[Dan] blends the past, present and future of the blues into one powerful sound.” — Calgary Blues Festival



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