

## The Audience is Part of the Band

**By Paul Freeman  
For The Daily News**

Posted: 03/13/2013 06:52:13 PM PDT

Updated: 03/14/2013 12:22:10 AM PDT

Some boys like to fantasize by building forts or race tracks. Bay Area bluesman Daniel Castro, however, dreamed of the Fender Stratocaster.

"My brother and I used to build guitars out of sheets of wood paneling, cut out a couple of Strats and put some fishing line on it," Castro recalls. "Yeah, I guess we wanted to play guitar pretty bad."

His older sister introduced him to the blues. "I would constantly be stealing her old Stella guitar, tucking myself in the garage and plunking away, trying to figure out a few chords. Finally, she realized that I dug it, so she taught me that old Jimmy Reed riff in the key of E. Then she handed me two B. B. King albums. And I've been at it ever since.

"When I heard B.B. King playing, it just nailed me. Same thing when I heard Peter Green, Freddie King, Albert King, Albert Collins or any of those guys. It's just beautiful, honest music."

Born in 1954, Castro grew up in South Central Los Angeles. By 15, he was a fixture on that area's blues scene.

"I was having a great time. I was very young. I was just happy I could call myself a professional, because we were getting paid, making \$20 a night," he says, chuckling.

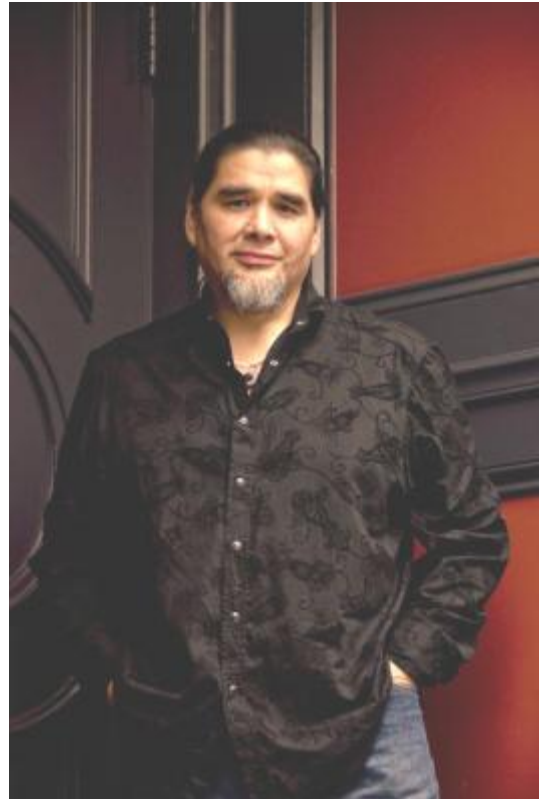
"Looking back, South Central was a pretty rough area. But I was in a cool band, the Inner City Blues Band. We had an opportunity to back up some pretty decent people. I was playing almost every weekend, then getting up and going to school every Monday and taking off the following weekend again. That was a real education."

Castro backed many of the artists from the Johnny Otis Show, including Pee Wee Crayton, Little Esther Phillips and Delmar Evans.

"I learned from everybody I worked with. Delmar Evans was a good talker. But the person that really set me straight, bless his heart, was a guy named Percy. I don't know his last name. I'm sure he's no longer around. He was already in his 60s then. He was a tenor sax player. He had such a beautiful tone. He had been on the road forever, with all kinds of people, an old road dog who had settled in L.A. and played with all the bands around there. Sadly, he was a drinker and had been a heroin addict. But he just had a beautiful soul and a real great love for the music. He taught me a lot about playing the music, the blues, being true to your roots."

Castro fronted his own band. In 1989, he was also working as a rep for an amplifier manufacturing company. When the Bay Area territory opened up, he checked it out, liked what he saw, and got an apartment. A week later the Loma Prieta earthquake hit. "All my friends in L.A. were going, 'You're moving up there?!'" Castro laughs.

The job didn't work out and he moved back south for a while. "I kept coming up once a month, because I knew I had a good thing going here. I really fell in love with the music scene. Fell in love with North Beach. At that time, there was music, blues, going on up and down the street. I saw Johnny Nitro play, Tommy Castro, Ron Hacker and those guys. And they were playing blues like I really like to play blues. I had a band down south. But I would come up once a month and play for peanuts, just to get things going."



He moved here permanently in 1995 and is now based in South San Jose. "Up here, I made friends with a lot of great artists, a lot of beautiful people, a lot of beautiful fans. Very accepting people."

Castro currently leads a three-piece band. The guitarist-vocalist is joined by bassist Johnny Yu and drummer David Perper. "It's blues-based stuff, but there's a lot of roots, Americana kind of feel in it," Castro says. "We're a three-piece band, but I believe that the audience is the fourth piece."

He's excited about the new album the band is now polishing. It's Castro's third, but first featuring all original material.

"In order to get anywhere, you've got to write your originals and get on out there. And that's what we're doing. We're hoping to knock on some doors with this, maybe sign with a label. And I look forward to getting this band on the road, reaching more people, making a really good push at establishing ourselves on the world market. I see no reason why we can't, if we work our butts off.

"Writing songs is a hard discipline. But I'm one of those guys who always has a riff, a lick. And you just work it to death and try to write some words to it. I'll have an idea and come up with a couple of verses. My significant other, Julie Friend, she's a great lyricist and she helps me write a lot of these tunes. So we're kind of partners in that. She's on some of the tunes we just recorded. She has a beautiful voice. I hit the jackpot with this one."

The big reward is having the material accepted by audiences. "When you see somebody singing the lyrics to your songs, that is a fantastic feeling. When somebody connects with a song that you've written and they feel like it's about them, that's very gratifying."

Castro has developed a strong Northern California following. He again headlines the Blues Jam at Redwood City's Club Fox on Wednesday. "The fans there always get into it," he says. "We've got a great community of blues lovers here in the Bay Area."

He returns to the venue on March 24 for the Raise the Roof concert to benefit the Blues Foundation's fund for building a Hall of Fame in Memphis. Among other featured artists are Earl Thomas, Kenny Neal, Sista Monica and Lady Bianca.

"Earl is a great artist and a great writer. I really dig what he does. When he asked me to do this thing for the Blues foundation, I was flattered beyond belief."

Castro says the music business is rough, but he perseveres. "Why would you get into it, knowing all the pitfalls? There's no money in it. But it's just that you love the music so much. It has a hold on you and you have a need to express it. And whether you make five dollars or five million, this is what you have to do. I made that decision a long, long time ago, if I was going to be busting my ass for anybody, from now on, I'm going to bust it for me and my music career."

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## **Music**

**What:** Club Fox Blues Jam featuring Daniel Castro

**Where:** Club Fox, 2223 Broadway, Redwood City

**When:** 7 p.m. Wednesday

**Tickets:** \$5; 877-435-9849 or [www.clubfoxrwc.com](http://www.clubfoxrwc.com)

**What:** Raising the Roof Concert for the Blues Hall of Fame Museum

**With:** Earl Thomas, Kenny Neal, Sista Monica, Daniel Castro, more

**Where:** Club Fox, 2223 Broadway, Redwood City

**When:** 4 p.m. March 24

**Tickets:** \$15-\$20; 877-435-9849 or [www.clubfoxrwc.com](http://www.clubfoxrwc.com)

**Artist website:** [www.danielcastro.com](http://www.danielcastro.com)