

Castro won't part with his guitar for a minute

By Rich Freedman
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Daniel Castro gets that his fellow musicians need a break from the business occasionally. Kind of like a vegetarian getting that someone at the dinner table who is going to chow into a burger.

What's right for one may not be right for another.

"I see friends go through it and just need to take a break and come back and be fresh. I see that, but I've never felt that way," Castro said. So, by golly, the veteran blues player does what he's done since his youth — he plays. Vacation? Not in this lifetime. At least not now. Not with the just-released "Desperate Rain" available for promoting.

"I never stop. I've never taken a break," Castro said. "To me, it's about playing and trying to get better and keeping my chops up and writing tunes. It's just what I do every day." Leave the guitar home and flee to Cabo for a week? Forget it. Jump on a plane with his long-time significant other, writer / vocalist Julie Friend, and do that tourist thing without performing? C'mon now, get real.

Fortunately for Castro's fans, that doesn't appear soon, with Wednesday's "Hot House Blues" gig at the Empress Theatre around the corner. Sure, it's not quite as physically easy as 30 years ago. But Castro keeps doing it.

"I'm constantly reminded every day when I get up and my face hits the floor," chuckled Castro. "You just do your best to keep fit and eat right. You're talking to a guy who never smoke, drank or did any drugs. I can't even tell you what wine or beer tastes like. I'm boring as those things go. "It's all about the music", Castro said.

Castro moved to San Francisco from Orange County in 1989, returned south two years later, and boomeranged to the Bay Area for good in 1995. Castro felt his stock rise on the credibility scale in the region about 10 years ago. Castro released his first CD, "No Surrender," in 1999, followed by "Live at the Saloon" in 2003. It took another 10 years to release, "Desperate Rain." "I want to get it right," Castro said. "What can I tell you? I can put out a CD of some kind every other year, but I just would not have the money to do it right."

Castro's trio includes drummer David Perper and bass player and vocalist Johnny Yu. Though Castro's known and played with Yu many years, the reincarnated Daniel Castro Band emerged two years ago. Castro said he's "having a ball' with Yu and Perper, focusing on original material. "We serve the song. That's the No.1 important thing," Castro said. "Make the song come alive."

One more thing. No, he's not related to fellow bluesman Tommy Castro, who played the Empress on New Year's Eve. The two are pals, Daniel said, sharing an anecdote. "One time a guy came up to me and asked, 'Is Tommy Castro your dad?' I looked at him and said, 'Yes he is.'" Daniel Castro is 59. Tommy is 58.

If you go...

What: The Daniel Castro Band

Where: Empress Theatre, 330 Virginia St., Vallejo

When: Wednesday, 7 p.m.

Cost: \$7 advance, \$9 door

Info: empresstheatre.org;

danielcastro.com