

Dan Hicks' Caucasian Hip-Hop For Hicksters

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Author: **Steve Roby** Showdate : **Feb. 18, 2015** Performance Venue : **Yoshi's Oakland**

Bay Area legend Dan Hicks performed to a sold-out crowd at Yoshi's on Wednesday. The audience was made up of his loyal fans (Hicksters) who probably first heard his music on KSAN, Jive 95, back in 1969.

At age 11, Hicks started out as a drummer, and was heavily influenced by jazz and Dixieland music, often playing dances at the VFW. During the folk revival of the '60s, he picked up a guitar, and would go to hootenannies while attending San Francisco State. Hicks began writing songs, an eclectic mix of Western swing, folk, jazz, and blues, and eventually formed Dan Hicks and his Hot Licks. His offbeat humor filtered its way into his stage act. Today, with tongue firmly planted in cheek, Hicks sums up his special genre as "Caucasian hip-hop."



Over four decades later, Hicks still delivers a unique performance, and Wednesday's show was jammed with many great moments.

One of the evenings highlights was the classic "I Scare Myself," which Hicks is still unclear if it's a love song when he wrote it back in 1969. "I was either in love, or I'd just eaten a big hashish brownie," recalled Hicks. Adding to the song's paranoia theme, back-up singers Daria and Roberta Donnay donned dark shades while Benito Cortez played a chilling violin solo complete with creepy horror movie sound effects.

Hicks showed off his fancy footwork on "Exactly Like You," and at one point, Hicks, Daria, and Donnay resembled a multi-armed Hindu God. The singer/songwriter also gave away several copies of Live at Davies Symphony Hall as a "publicity stunt" to a few lucky souls seated close to the stage. The CD was recorded in 2012 at a major concert that celebrated Dan's 70th birthday. It featured guest appearances by Ricki Lee Jones, Harry Shearer, Maria Muldaur, Roy Rogers, Tuck and Patti, Sid Page, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, and many others.

"Canned Music" was another crowd favorite. Hicks has updated the lyrics to the 1970 song for the digital age. It's surprising Apple hasn't used it for an iTunes commercial. "One hit on your mouse puts it in your house" seems like the perfect catch phrase for downloading music from the giant Internet store.

Hicks closed with "He Don't Care," a humorous song he wrote back in the Haight-Ashbury days, and used the 1968 film Revolution. In an interview, Hicks indicated that he was sitting on Haight Street with his guitar when the film crew started shooting a scene. The line "He's stoned" was a perfect description for many of the hippie characters walking around back then.

Hicks' 2015 Tour schedule has him on the road with multiple dates lasting through December. There's a lot more info on Dan's website (danhicks.net), and an opportunity to see some of his exceptional artwork.

The Lick Men: Benito Cortez (violin, mandolin), Michael Price (bass), and Paul "Guitar" Robinson (guitar).

The Lickettes: Daria (vocals, percussion, melodica, castanets), and Roberta Donnay (vocals, percussion).

Set List: Topsy | Canned Music | Caravan | Blues (My Naughty Sweetie Gives to Me) | News From Up The Street | Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette) | I Scare Myself | Exactly Like You | Twisted | Medley: The Sheik of Araby/Take the 'A' Train/Paper Moon | He Don't Care

Encore: I Feel Like Singing

INTERVIEWS | ROBERTA DONNAY: A CONVERSATION WITH DAN HICKS | Published on May 5th, 2013

I've been performing on the road with Dan Hicks now about eight years, as a "Lickette" and member of the band "Dan Hicks and The Hot Licks". I wanted to ask Dan about some musical things I thought he might want to talk about and also, maybe talk about life in general. I'm quite pleased with the way this turned out and especially with Dan's answers which are both insightful and entertaining! I hope you enjoy them as much as I did and still do." – Roberta Donnay

RD: Of all the characters in all the songs you've written, which character do you most identify with ?

DH: Honestly, I cannot find one particular character in the songs where I say, "That's me!". (Of course, there's a bit of "me" in every song.) Most of the "identifying" happens in the writing process – where, in most songs, I assume the first-person narrative as being myself. Also, in singing or delivering the song it helps to think: this story has happened or is happening to me. (Even if it didn't or isn't).

In writing, I might create someone who I wish were me. A fantasy trip. Vicarious adventure. If I want to be flip in answering this question, I could say the guy "Crazy" in "Crazy, 'cause he is" – "He's a questionnaire with no question there !"

RD: You have such a distinctive style of scat singing (and yodeling!) How did you develop this style and where do your ideas come from?

DH: I guess I haven't thought much that my scatting is "distinctive". When I scat I want to be right up there with the other scatters of the world. I think of making a good, melodic, creative, listenable solo. The best "idea" people are the instrumentalists, so why not try to be as good as them? I like to vary my sounds, my vowels, my syllables, my consonants, but mostly make it swing – maybe it be good jazz. I think my style has developed just by doing it and doing it. Having confidence that it's not schlock or corny helps, too. I like to keep scatting at somewhat of a minimum because I'm not sure how much of it people want to hear or can take. The yodeling is my stab at yodeling. I must have heard it in scatting, somewhere. You have to keep a cool lid on that, too. Yodeling does have a bad rap. When soloing I do consciously think: "I think I'll yodel now!" But otherwise, I'm just flowing with the changes.

RD: Who are your favorite singers?

DH: It depends on the song, the particular recording, the moment. I've aspired to have the ability that many singers already possess. I hear good (and enviable) stuff in many singers. When asked this question I tend to go back to the original jazz singer people. Joe Williams, Anita O'Day, like that. I used to like Bing Crosby but now I think he's a self-indulgent prune.

RD: What inspires you ?

DH: I think I'm inspired by my current position in life – being with the right partner, being sober, being musical, being funny, being creative, being a free American, being respected, having good friends. There were times when I didn't think I had any of these things – I wasn't very inspired. I get inspired by doing something well.

RD: Are there any contemporary (or still alive) artists that you listen to?

DH: My listening, currently, is pretty much the luck of the draw. I don't seem to "put on" records or discs or tapes of anybody. My radio is on to hear the jazz channels. Like-wise TV Comcast. Likewise Sirius radio in the car. Who would I go see right now? You tell me ! Maybe a revival band of The Benny Goodman Orchestra or Don Rickles in a coffeehouse, or Randy Newman in a seminar.

RD: Who is the one person who most influenced you in your life or if you could have dinner with anyone (dead or alive) who would it be and what would you ask them?

DH: I don't have any one person that influenced me, I don't think. I am a product of my parents, so I think of them and their standards. Mr. Alphonse Schmaltz, my high school band teacher, influenced a lot of us. He was a jazz pianist and we'd have jam sessions at noon-time in the band room. I remember still sailin' when I went back to my regular classes.

I would like to have dinner (or maybe just coffee) with singer-songwriter Jon Hendricks and ask him about the beginning of Lambert-Hendricks-and-Ross. And more specifically how he put lyrics to those jazz instrumental solos.



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RD: Any plans for future recordings?

DH: I've got some more recording left in me. Different projects, different songs, new ideas. Somehow I must feel that getting product out isn't that big a deal. It's a good thing everyone doesn't feel that way !

RD: Is there anything that we don't know about you that you'd like to share?

DH: In the sixth grade, I "pantomimed" a record, "Poor Little Josey" with this girl next door for a talent show. The recording was by Rosemary Clooney and Jimmy Boyd.

In the sixth grade (in a different school), I wrote a play "Valentine's Day In South America" performed by the class for the school.

About 20 different people have recorded my tunes from Bill Wyman to the Bleeker Street Reality Band to Bette Midler to Muzak.

I am lousy at sports, car mechanics, cooking gourmet meals, remembering new lyrics, never getting angry, and other stuff.

God allowed the Pearl Harbor attack to happen on December 7, 1941. Two days later He made up for it by having me born ! This is my story and I'm stickin' to it ! I will always be humble to my dying day. On my dying day I will explain to the world how lucky they have been to be alive the same time as me !

For more on Dan Hicks: www.danhicks.net

CONCERT REVIEW: Hot 'n' droll lickmeister

By JOSEF WOODARD, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

March 3, 2013 1:00 AM

True confession: the first bonafide rock concert I went to, as an already music-obsessed 13-year-old, was a triple-header in the gymnasium of Santa Barbara City College too many years ago to count. On the bill were Quicksilver Messenger Service, Goldfinger (with Richard Torrance, a local who went on to some fame) and the inimitable and unforgettable Dan Hicks and his Hot Licks.

He made a deep impression then, with his love of things vintage and genre-straddling ñ western-swing, gypsy jazz, Duke Ellington, '20s treats, laconically satirical lyrics and more. In every local appearance since, most recently at the Live Oak Music Festival, the Lobero Theatre and again at the Maverick Saloon on Wednesday, he seems as out-of-time and timeless as ever. He's a true-blue original, and one of the drollest men in show biz.

As part of the current eleventh year of the treasured "Tales from the Tavern" series at the Maverick, Mr. Hicks showed up with a hot version of his Hot Licks, while he introduced himself by saying "I'll be playing the role of Dan." The boss with the deadpan charisma, now 70, was perched at the center of the quintet, with the fine solo-handy instrumentalists on one side — violinist/mandolinist Benito Cortez and guitarist Paul Robinson (sometimes inserting what Mr. Hicks called "simulated bass solo, ladies and gentlemen") and signature sound of snugly harmonizing female vocalists and retro fashionistas, Roberta Donay and Daria on the other.

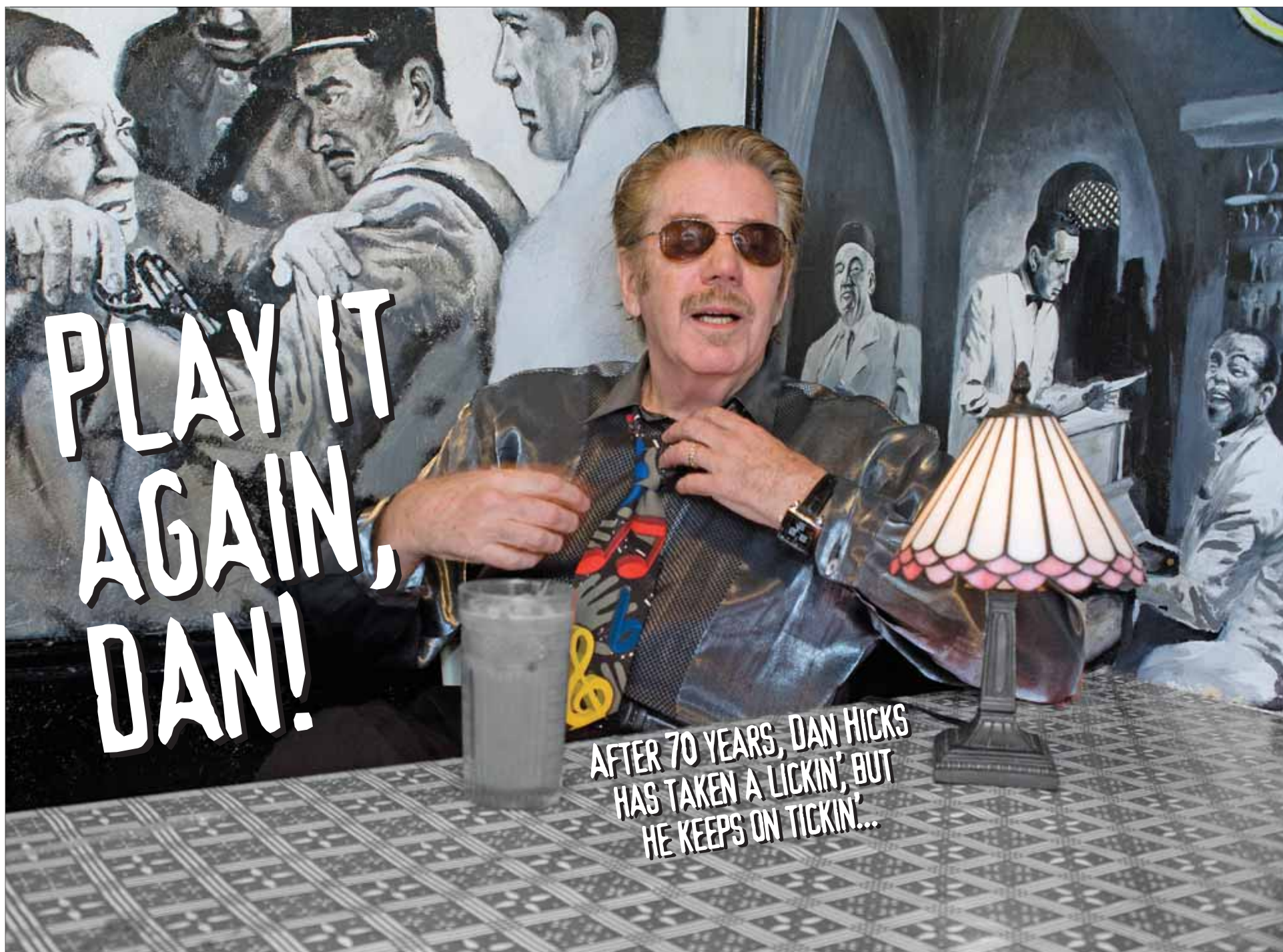
After kicking off with a gypsy-jazz instrumental, the show swerved through various corners of Mr. Hicks' strange yet familiar world, including his classics "Canned Music" (with some updated, digital era lyric inserts to the original) and "I Scare Myself." Late in the show, he quipped that the group has settled on a new description of its musical genre, "Caucasian hip hop." Behind that joke, there is something to the idea of intricate wordplay and vocal stuntwork tucked within the seemingly lazy, hazy veneer of some of the songs.

Yes, he is a hopeless wisenheimer who doesn't mind messing with the heads of a given crowd or room, who introduced his song "Payday" by asking "anybody out there have jobs? I know there's this trust fund kid thing going around." He introduced a country song by saying "we tried to sell this one to Willie Nelson, but he told us to get off his property."

Dry comic antics aside, Mr. Hicks is also a passionate champion of pre-rock 'n' roll American music, moving on this Wednesday night between a vocal version of Duke Ellington's "Caravan" to a Bob Wills vehicle, "What's the Matter with the Mail," to Emmett Miller's 1930s number "The Ghost of the St. Louis Blues" and gymnastic vocal workout for the Licketts in the form of Annie Ross' "Twisted."

Before launching into the final tune, Mr. Hicks accessed his inner goofball ñ never far below the surface ñ announced "and now, a little bottleneck guitar for you, because you've been such a groovy audience," before using his plastic water bottle to play some woozy, wobbly licks. As if rolling his eyes in self-effacing mode, he added "what a way to make a living." During that last song, he also interjected some hilarious faux Bob Dylan jibber jabber in the verses, and the band's curtain closer was none other than the famed jazz tune "Cherokee."

What a way to make a living, indeed, and for us fans, Mr. Hicks is always worth periodically checking in on, over lo, these several decades.



ROBERT VENTE

I don't think I ever made up my mind that I was going to be a professional musician—it just kind of kept going,” says Dan Hicks, displaying his dry wit and a hint of the slow Southern drawl that betrays his Arkansas roots. “I liked it. And at the time, when I started out, it never felt like work. I just liked being creative and I found that I could come up with songs.

“This is all *self-discovery* kind of stuff,” he adds, punctuating his speech with verbal jabs like someone who’s just been poked. “And I liked it. I *liked* discovering that I could write a good tune.

“I guess I was just destined to do this.”

At 70, Hicks—the self-professed King of Folk Swing—is still going strong, cultivating a stony musical melange that has led

one music writer to label the Mill Valley singer, songwriter and bohemian artist as Hoagy Carmichael with a roach clip.

This week, SF Jazz—presenters of the annual San Francisco Jazz Festival—is honoring Hicks and his contribution to popular music with a 70th birthday bash at Davies Symphony Hall. Among the past collaborators or admiring fans scheduled to perform are composer and keyboardist Van Dyke Parks (who co-wrote many of the songs on the Beach Boys classic album *Pet Sounds*), Rickie Lee Jones, folk legend Ramblin’ Jack Elliot, jug-band revivalist Jim Kweskin and singer Maria Muldaur, Harry Shearer (of *Spinal Tap* and *The Simpsons* fame), Ray Benson of Asleep

at the Wheel, bluesmen John Hammond and Roy Rogers, the vocal and guitar duo Tuck and Patti, and guitarist Bruce Forman.

But the main attraction at this all-star concert is a reunion of the original Hot Licks. That short-lived band nudged

Hicks—a sometimes tender, always hip tunesmith—onto the national stage

with a quirky mix of cowboy folk, swing jazz, blues, old-timey sentimentality, and tongue-in-cheek lyrics.

At a time when Grand Funk Railroad was barreling up the hard rock charts and the Moody Blues were stretching the boundaries of prog-rock in search of the lost chord, the Hot Licks were serving up

wry tales about diner waitresses, blue-collar workers and barflies masked in a brilliant blend of humor, beat sensibility and pseudo-nostalgia.

Hicks disbanded the Hot Licks in 1974 after reaching the apex of his career, appearing on the coveted cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine.

“We wanted to get the original Blue Thumb label band together, with Sid Page on violin, and the girls [singers Naomi Ruth Eisenberg and Maryanne Price] and Jon Weber, who was the first guitarist from back in ’68,” Hicks says of the upcoming reunion. “I want to get the band that works with me now to do something and we have some guests who I’ve recorded with or who I’ve been on the bill with or who have recorded one of my songs.

BY GREG CAHILL

"So we have a few people coming in." Shearer will serve as emcee.

"I'm glad to have him there—I've bit off quite a hunk here," Hicks says of the concert. "There's going to be quite a little show, if it comes off."

Hicks also will perform a couple of instrumentals with members of a Dixieland band that he played in during junior high school in Santa Rosa, his "hometown."

That formative band included Lowell "Banana" Levinger, who in the mid-'60s went on to record hit records as a member of the Youngbloods and, more recently, as a Marin-based solo folk artist.

The April 6 SF Jazz show is a companion to a similar bash held a decade ago at the Fillmore Auditorium to mark Hicks' 60th birthday. That earlier event also had an all-star roster of artists who had performed with Hicks over the years, from the '60s-era Charlatans to his more recent Acoustic Warriors.

The Fillmore concert spawned a CD and DVD.

For the record, Hicks turned 70 on Dec. 9, but the SF Jazz organization preferred to wait till spring to present the show.

"I agreed," Hicks says somewhat bemused. "You know, turning 70—that lasts a while."

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HICKS MAY NOT have set out to become a professional musician—especially one who has achieved legendary status and a tribute at the home of the San Francisco Symphony—but music has been his main pursuit for most of his life.

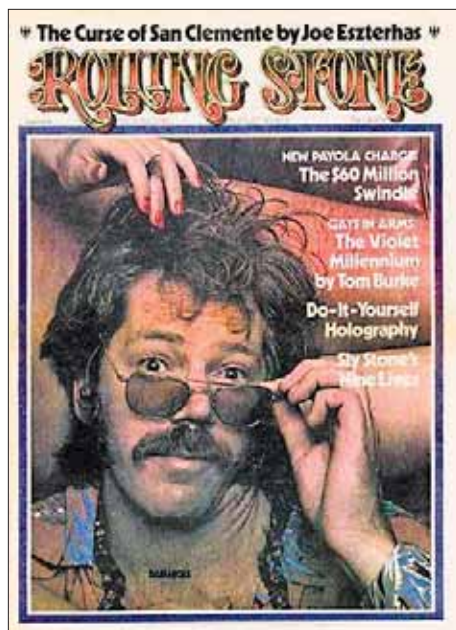
As a ninth-grader at Montgomery Senior High School in Santa Rosa, he started playing drums in a jazz band at a talent show. It was Hicks' first exposure to playing jazz, though he had listened to Benny Goodman and other swing artists on record.

"We had Dixieland music books that had these little parts written out," he recalls. "That's how the Dixieland Dudes were born."

After school, Hicks, Banana and a few other classmates would hang out at the Apex Book Store, a coffeehouse in downtown Santa Rosa. "We used to sit around and jam on guitars," Hicks says.

But he spent most of his high-school years sitting on a drum throne. "Playing the drums, I was exposed to a lot of different music," he says. "I would play these casuals with different guys around the Santa Rosa area and I heard a lot of jazz standards."

At 19, as a radio and television broadcasting student at San Francisco State University and at the height of the folk revival, he turned to the guitar more seriously, playing and singing folk standards and original songs by Pete Seeger and other artists on the local scene. Eventually, he was introduced to the music of the Jim Kweskin Jug Band, a Greenwich Village



How big was a Rolling Stone cover in 1973? Mick Jagger, Elton John, Rod Stewart, Paul Newman, Jerry Garcia, Diana Ross and Richard Nixon also graced the front of the mag that year.

folk and blues act that included a teenaged singer named Maria Muldaur. He played and sang in a couple of local folk trios, including the Redwood Singers and he performed at small bars, North Beach coffee houses and such cramped folk clubs as the Scene and the Drinking Gourd, as well as the occasional hootenanny in Berkeley.

"The singer/songwriter guys and that style of singing sort of evolved for me until the mid- to late '60s when I started appreciating it more," he says. "Then I started trying to emulate those jazz vocalists like [San Francisco-based jazz trombonist and singer] Jack Teagarden. But, you know, I was studying to be a broadcaster—music was my main interest, but I didn't feel like I'd be good enough to ever be a professional musician."

That all changed when he joined the Charlatans.

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IN THE MID-'60S, the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco harbored a nascent folk-rock scene—unsullied by the hard drugs that later would lay waste to many of its inhabitants. One of those bands was the Charlatans, which featured Boz Scaggs, Michael Ferguson, Mike Wilhelm (who would go on to form the legendary Flamin' Groovies), and George Hunter.

"I used to run into those guys once in while on the street and in little places, with their long hair and Beatle boots and stuff," Hicks says. "That was 1965, maybe even late 1964."

"George was a player himself—he played tambourine—but he was more or less a manager. He got these guys together to rehearse in the living room of his old Victorian. I ran into them when they were just getting rid of their drummer. I was still in college and I had a part-time

job, finishing up my last semester, so I had a pretty busy little schedule."

It didn't take long for the Charlatans to get discovered, literally on the street, when a business owner from Virginia City, Nevada, approached the band about playing at his the Red Dog Saloon as the house band that summer.

The saloon—which served gourmet French meals amid a backdrop of seminal light shows and loud folk rock—quickly became a popular watering hole for Bay Area bohemians and Sierra residents keen on its Wild West flair and psychedelic atmosphere.

It turned out that his band mates had not only a taste for old-timey music, but also turn-of-the-century gambler chic and potent hallucinogens (LSD was still legal).

The band members also had a penchant for packing side arms onstage.

"What I remember most about the Red Dog was all the guns," said band member and poster artist Michael Ferguson in an interview for the book *The Art of Rock*. "That's the only thing we spent our money on—bullets. One of my favorite things was going down to the dump and spending an hour setting up cans and bottles, then finding an old chair, sitting down and plunking away."

"It was a real loose Western scene."

Hicks tends to downplay the gunplay, but fondly recalls the rustic nature of the town. "It wasn't like people were shooting each other," he says, "but it definitely was a throw-back to another time—the town certainly had the feel of another century."

Yet, for all the Old West chic, the Charlatans helped usher in a new age, musically and socially.

In fact, Hicks is part of an elite cadre of bohemians who helped to spawn the '60s counterculture. Author Richie Unterberger, a leading authority on the psychedelic-rock scene, acknowledges in the *AllMusic Guide* that "the San Francisco-based Charlatans have been widely credited as starting the Haight-Ashbury psychedelic scene. In retrospect, their contribution was more of a social one, planting the seeds of a rock counterculture with their unconventional, at times outrageous dress and attitudes. While they occasionally delved into guitar distortion and fractured, stoned songwriting, the Charlatans' music was rooted in good-time jug-band blues, not psychedelic freak-outs. That's not to say their records didn't have a low-key, easygoing charm, although they didn't match the innovations of the Jefferson Airplane and other peers."

Hicks doesn't really think of the Charlatans as a seminal psychedelic band. "Psy-

chedelic is not a term I use that much," he says dryly. "Though I guess it's a label that works and we definitely were part of the San Francisco Sound. But we also did 'Somebody Stole My Gal'—old-timey songs, too."

"Basically, the Charlatans were folk rock. Their repertoire was a lot of plugged-in folk with a little Chuck Berry thrown in."

"It was loud dance music."

The Charlatans returned to San Francisco that fall to find the underground rock scene—led by the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service and others—in full swing.

The band soon became one of the first to play at the promoter Chet Helms' landmark Family Dog-produced concerts at the Avalon Ballroom, in the Polk Gulch district of San Francisco. The Charlatans lasted another three years, right through 1967's Summer of Love. "I wanted to do something more folk, more jazz oriented," says Hicks of his decision to leave the band. "I wanted to expand my solo act."

Enter the Hot Licks.

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THE HOT LICKS were anything but loud and raucous, reflecting Hicks' own decidedly laid-back persona and love of jazz. "The idea for me to form a quieter, harmony-oriented, jazz-fiddle group with my own original tunes was a departure," he admits.

He tapped violinist David LaFlamme, who left after a short stint to concentrate on his own band, the then-emerging It's a Beautiful Day. Violinist Sid Page, a Santa Rosa native,

took LaFlamme's spot. Guitarist John Weber, upright bassist Jaime Leopold, drummer Terry Wilson, and vocalists Tina Viola Gancher and Sherry Snow rounded out the original lineup.

"It just evolved," Hicks says of the Hot Licks sound. "I got girls who could sing jazzy and the result was a combination of the people in the band and the sound we came up with together."

The band's 1969 self-titled debut featured 11 original songs, including early versions of "Canned Music" and "I Scare Myself," which were reworked on later albums before becoming signature songs.

"Because I was a jazz fan from being a drummer, I wanted to make it as jazzy as possible, given that my guitar playing isn't the best jazz guitar you'll ever hear," Hicks says. "Not everything was totally swing, but a lot of it was."

The album's mellow mood stood in stark contrast to the hard rock, heavy metal and down-and-dirty blues heard on both commercial and underground radio.

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The Charlatans—that's Hicks, second from left—were aligned with the mid-'60s psychedelic movement, but their sound was more traditionally blues-based than other bands of the scene.

MARIN'S BEST EVERY WEEK

APRIL 6 - APRIL 12, 2012

Pacific Sun

AND THE LICKS JUST KEEP ON COMIN'

Dan Hicks turns 70—and he's hotter than ever... [P 12]

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: A guy at the gym asked me if I had a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor... [SEE PAGE 11]

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Here's to your health, Marin!
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<12 Play it again, Dan!

Sales were...slow.

The 1971 sophomore effort, *Where's the Money?*, saw the band switching labels and shifting personnel to the lineup being celebrated at the April 6 SF Jazz concert.

Gone were Weber, Wilson, Gancher and Snow.

In the place of the original singers, Hicks brought in vocalists Naomi Ruth Eisenberg and Maryanne Price, rechristened as the Lickettes, whom Hicks discovered in Marin after moving to Sausalito.

Both ended up contributing to the trademark Hot Licks sound.

"I guess I always liked that call-and-response stuff I'd heard on the Ray Charles recordings and with Tex Beneke and the Modernaires and all kinds of group vocals," Hicks says.

Where's the Money? featured the now drummerless Hot Licks in a live setting that aptly captured the act's clever onstage banter and tongue-in-cheek charm.

It squeaked onto the *Billboard* Top 200 album chart.

The 1972 follow-up, *Striking It Rich*, had a darker tone, but enough jazz and cowboy kitsch to win new fans. Meanwhile, 1973's presciently titled *Last Train to Hicksville*, with drummer Bob Scott on board, ranged from the nostalgia of "My Old Timey Baby" to the propulsive swing-jazz of "Sure Beats Me" to the steel-guitar-driven Bob Wills-inspired plaint "Payday Blues."

Folks took notice.

The album climbed to No. 67 on the Top 200 album chart. And *Rolling Stone* published a cover story. But Hicks decided he'd had enough.

"I didn't like it anymore," he says when pressed for an explanation. "Just didn't want to do it anymore. There were personality problems and I figured, hey, I can play guitar and I can sing—that's not going to go away."

"I just didn't want to be a bandleader anymore."

He disbanded the Hot Licks, pulled together a trio to meet the band's concert commitments and moved on to other things, including a soundtrack to *Hey, Good Lookin'* that he wrote and recorded for then-red-hot filmmaker and animator Ralph Bakshi. But the music was never used in the film, and Hicks later released the material on Warner Bros.

"I did a variety of stuff," he says of that

time. "Hung out in Mill Valley mostly."

In 1977, on the 10th anniversary of the Summer of Love, *Rolling Stone* phoned again, this time to include Hicks in a Haight/Ashbury reunion photo with Jerry Garcia, Grace Slick, Steve Miller and John Cipollina, among others, posing with the Golden Gate Bridge in the background.

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BUT HICKS DIDN'T wallow in nostalgia for the era, or his old bandmates. He continued to perform and record, sometimes as a

solo act, sometimes with new bands, and occasionally with such big-name collaborators as Elvis Costello, Rickie Lee Jones, Tom Waits, Bette Midler and Brian Setzer.

And eventually he came to enjoy his newfound status as a kind of elder statesman of hipdom.

"I'm pretty lucky," he says. "What I do is pretty well accepted and has continued to be. I never was a real mainstream pop artist or anything. I'm more of a cult figure—an alternative guy for special people who can dig this stuff. And that's been successful. I mean, I have the SF Jazz Festival honoring me—that's pretty good."

"I still like sitting down with a tape recorder and creating stuff—I don't write as much, but I like arranging songs and getting new ideas for material. And I think my singing has gotten better, and I really like that—I still have chops and I can even do stuff that I never used to do."

"And the being onstage thing is good, too. The ability to be on stage and to improvise and patter and make people laugh, that whole thing is...well, it sounds kind of corny to say it's a gift, but it feels like a gift. It feels like somebody laid it on

me. I mean, I would not make the claim that I'm an improv comedian—I would not *make* that claim—but I kind of am, though. And that's pretty cool. It's a bonus. Though I can't say how funny I'm gonna be at Davies Symphony Hall," he adds with a laugh. "There's a lot at stake there."

"Sure, I could say things might have gone differently—everyone wants to be as popular as they can be, but I'm doing good." ★

Dig a little deeper with Greg at gcahill51@gmail.com.



One of Hick's more recent projects has been the *Christmas Jug Band*, the seasonal Yuletide yeomen who sing such irreverent songs as 'Santa Lost a Ho' and 'Daddy's Drinkin' Up Our Christmas.'

COMING SOON

Dan Hicks' 70th Birthday

Bash, a reunion of the original Hot Licks, plus special guests, takes place Friday, April 6, at 8pm, at Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco.
\$25-\$65. 866/920-5299.

Seriously wacky night celebrates singer/songwriter Dan Hicks

DAN HICKS | APRIL 7, 2012 | BY: DAVID BECKER

The band was hot, cooking through a bouncy, boogie-woogie-flavored rendition of the Jim Kweskin charmer "Beedle Um Bum."

If you paid attention, however, you could see Dan Hicks -- the ringleader and guest of honor at Friday's SFJAZZ shindig at Davies Symphony Hall -- making subtle adjustments to the sound. At one point, he motioned vigorously to David Grisman, only the finest mandolin player alive, to pull back a bit. The kazoo section (including Kweskin himself) was having its moment. Don't want to crowd a good kazooist.



And there you had Hicks in a nutshell: A vastly talented musician who's serious about being a bit ridiculous. (By the way, playing bass on the Kweskin tune was Harry Shearer, the man behind Spinal Tap cucumber-warmer Derek Smalls. Just to add a little surrealism to the wackiness.)

Celebrating his 70th birthday in grand style, the Marin iconclast assembled a stellar group of friends to rip through some favorite tunes and show there's still plenty of life in the old dog. Word was that Hicks had prepared rather diligently for this show, but anyone worried about an overly slick experience had nothing to fear. The evening had a charmingly ragged feel, as musicians wandered on and off the stage and Hicks greeted each semi-spontaneous success with a bow and a mumbled "That's pretty much our show for the night."

Musicians included Hicks' old San Rafael colleagues in the Homeboys Jazz Ensemble, who gamely wrestled with a couple of jazz standards. Also on hand were the original version of the Hot Licks, Hicks' 1970s rocket to semi-fame, sounding a little ragged but having great fun with originals such as "Where's the Money?"

More in sync and better showcasing Hicks' wry talent were the new Hot Licks, who buoyed the singer through "He Don't Care," a loving, pitch-perfect poke at Marin hippie culture, and "That Ain't Right," as good an explanation of Hicks' thought process as you're going to get.

Notable guest turns included Asleep at the Wheel singer/bandleader Ray Benson, who brought out the best of Hicks' Western swing instincts breezing through "I'm An Old Cowhand," and guitar virtuoso Tuck Andress, who put a shine on Hicks' jazz jones as he and guitar ace Bruce Forman traded licks on "Take the A Train."

With folkie chanteuse Rickie Lee Jones, bluesmen John Hammond and Roy Rogers and country icon Ramblin' Jack Elliott also contributing to the festivities, it added up to a heck of a party. And a fitting tribute to a fitfully brilliant career perhaps best summed up by Hicks himself: "Rock star by night, and nobody by day."

Fete for a king: Dan Hicks at 70

Published 4:00 a.m., Tuesday, April 3, 2012

Dan Hicks is feeling the pressure, as he inspects a piece of scenery being painted at the studio above Mill Valley's Throckmorton Theatre. It is a giant cutout of a '40s automobile, all fender and tires, which he calls "Hicksville ambience." He regards painter Joan Reynolds balefully. "We're doing some visual stuff here," he says, "hopefully, I say. You always have to have hope. The show is two weeks from today. You have a night light in here?"

The wily hipster songwriter will be celebrating - and celebrated - in a Davies Symphony Hall concert on April 6 marking his 70th birthday with reunions of old Hicks musical associates and special guests such as Maria Muldaur, Van Dyke Parks, Rickie Lee Jones, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, John Hammond, Ray Benson of Asleep At the Wheel, Harry Shearer of Spinal Tap and others.



Musician Dan Hicks is seen in the studio where backgrounds for his 70th birthday concert at Davies Hall are being painted on Friday, March 23, 2012 in Mill Valley, Calif. Painter Joan Reynolds is helping to paint the backgrounds. Photo: Russell Yip, The Chronicle / SF



Music vocal Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks L to R: Hicks, Page, Girtton, Jaime Leopold, (seated) Price. Eisenbera 1973 March / SF

The reunions range from the original edition of Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks ("the people who made the records," he says) to members of junior high school folk groups from Santa Rosa such as Dick and Dan or the Redwood Singers ("We all know where Montgomery Village is," he says), pulled together into a loose assemblage he calls the Home Town Homeboys. None of the other musicians continued their careers in music and Hicks politely described the members, after one rehearsal, as "variable proficiencies."

There will be dancers, a seven-minute orchestral overture Hicks has composed from a medley of his best-loved compositions. And, as previously noted, there will be set design and painted scenery, the "Hicksville ambience."

In a career that has stretched from the very beginnings of the San Francisco rock music scene as drummer for the nearly forgotten rock group, the Charlatans, the band that started it all, through a series of classic recordings in the '70s as leader of Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks, a

Django Reinhardt-flavored acoustic ensemble, Dan Hicks has always been brand-name musical entertainment, a sly, wry, laconic voice of reason in an often bewildering world. Too arch and, perhaps, caustic for mainstream acclaim in the long run, Hicks nevertheless endeared himself

greatly to a fanatical few asking the musical question "Where's the Money?" Or "How Can I Miss You When You Won't Go Away?"

<http://www.sfgate.com/music/article/Fete-for-a-king-Dan-Hicks-at-70-3453688.php#photo-2769493>

Hicks, a tall, hulking presence who wheels around bucolic Mill Valley in an '83 Cadillac, is wearing a festive snap-button western-wear shirt and natty pair of vintage gray woven-leather shoes for his daytime stop to check the progress at the Throckmorton Theatre scenery shop of artist Steve Coleman last week. Hicks presided ten years ago over a (December 9) at the Warfield Theater, but agreed to postpone the celebration when SFJAZZ director Randall Kline suggested doing something in the spring at the symphony hall. Hicks is especially glad to be part of the San Francisco Jazz Festival.



Musician Dan Hicks talks about his 70th birthday concert on Friday, March 23, 2012 in Mill Valley, Calif. Photo: Russell Yip, The Chronicle / SF

"I do some jazz stuff," he says. "I consider myself, in a certain way, a jazz artist. I also consider myself a folk artist. I don't think I'm a jazz guitar player. I'm a folk guy. I'm a jazz guy. I'm not afraid to do some jazz up there."

Hicks and "my manager-slash-wife" Clare Wasserman sent invitations to a number of associates, musicians who had either sung his songs or recorded with Hicks in the past. But the program will not concentrate exclusively on Hicks' songs.

"I'm no Leonard Cohen," he says. "I'm not out there as the songwriter. I'm out there as the singer and player, although a lot of songs I wrote will be out there, too."

Hicks, who has been almost criminally ignored by the music industry establishment and critical elite, found his own style to suit his character and musical skills. He is a skillful observer, dry raconteur and one of the few songwriters still working who deserves to be described as witty. He is, in the title of one his songs, "The Walking One and Only" (which will be performed at the birthday concert by Tuck and Patti).

"It's my turn," he says, quickly changing tack. "No. I'm appreciative. I'm flattered that this is happening and I got all these people to come and guest. And they're going for my ideas. It's 'OK.' Not 'Oh, no, I'm not going to have to do that one.' That's a big part of the battle, convincing people of your ideas, in the music thing."

For Hicks, it is all about the show. "I don't view this as 'Oh, happy birthday to me,'" he says. "I see it as an opportunity to put something together. Lots of people have 70th birthdays."

DAN HICKS/ HIGHWAY 70: With guests Jim Kewskin, Rickie Lee Jones, Maria Muldaur, Ray Benson, John Hammond, Van Dyke Parks, Bruce Forman, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Harry Shearer, Roy Rogers, Tuck & Patti, others. 8 p.m. Friday, April 6 at Davies Symphony Hall. Tickets: \$65-\$25. Call (866) 920-5299 or www.sfjazz.org.

Joel Selvin is Senior Pop Music Correspondent to The Chronicle.



Dan Hicks and The Hot Licks *Tangled Tales* Quotes



5 STARS - "Dan Hicks is in top form on *Tangled Tales*, a dozen cool cuts." -- *San Francisco Chronicle*

"His latest, *Tangled Tales*, is one of his best, blending that western swing/Django/jazz/blues/roots/hippie eclecticism with all the expected sardonic (or just plain grouchy) lyrics, all drawled in style." -- *LA Weekly*

"Dan Hicks is an American original... *Tangled Tales* is a knee-shaking collection of originals and covers alike."
-- *NPR's All About Jazz/Weekend Edition*

"Dan Hicks sounds as young as ever, with his entrenched eccentricity and perpetual, passionate love of vintage music. On the spectrum of musicians who can play and crack wise, with Jimmy Buffett holding the mainstream end and the late Frank Zappa having nailed down the hipster extreme, Dan Hicks rests firmly in the fun middle ground, accessible and still a bit weird. Thank heavens." -- *Washington Post*

"Dan Hicks...no one at all sounds like him." -- *NPR's etown*

"*Tangled Tales* is Dan Hicks best album since he began his big comeback at the turn of the century!" -- *The Santa Fe New Mexican*

"Dan Hicks music has been labeled as outlaw country swing. I would call it psychotic country swing and I say that with reverence... the staccato based lyrics are irreverent, witty, dry odd and some of the best that are currently being written... there is an underlying brilliance to it all." -- *Blogcritics.org*

"*Tangled Tales*...Dan Hicks still has the formula for a masterpiece." -- *The Knoxville News Sentinel*

"Dan Hicks is still delivering the goods, wrapped in his own unique saddle blanket of gypsy jazz woven with western swing with threads of blues, bacon grease, and bebop tying it all together. Listening to *Tangled Tales* is like watching an R. Crumb cartoon character walk a tight rope. There's a quirky gonzo humor on the surface, but the music behind it is fiercely tight with no room for error. Listen to the syncopated stops and starts or the rhythm change-ups; take in the multi-layered harmonies or the too-cool instrumental breaks; take a deep breath and try to follow those crazily-comped chords or high-speed scats – there's nothing simple about this stuff, folks." -- *Jambase.com*

"Over a recording career that spans forty years, Dan Hicks has traveled a singular path serving up a blend of jazz, western swing, bluegrass and folk music...Hicks remains an American original and free spirit." -- *Icon Magazine*

"One thing's certain: Dan Hicks has swing and plenty of swagger. That's what sells this latest release...But attitude isn't everything: ...the songs and performances are top-notch too in their irreverent, rowdy even dangerous distillation of real American music." -- *East Bay Express*

"Dan Hicks hasn't changed a bit. He's still witty, more than a little nutty and as defiantly individualistic as a performer can be ("the band that wouldn't compromise" they called him 40 years ago. He still hasn't)... Put it this way: Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks remain the world's greatest novelty band—a novelty band so good that they make everyone else sound staid and all-too-"normal." -- *Buffalonews.com*

"To hear Dan Hicks make Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues" (on *Tangled Tales*) a brand new song is to bask in the glow of near-genius. There is a reason Dan Hicks & the Hot Licks have lasted as long as they have, and it has nothing to do with luck or Viagra. Rather it's that little ol' life force called soul, and to once again hear a whole album of it is to know the world is still turning in the right direction." -- *Sonicboomers.com*

"Acoustic swing master Dan Hicks doubles yer pleasure with wry toasted songs and snappy cool-jazz/folk playing in the Texas swing and Hot Club of France veins. And those chirpin' backup chicks - so retro, so hip!" -- *Philadelphia Daily News*

"The quirky legend that gave us "I Scare Myself" back in the '60s and '70s returns with a jazzy, moving recording entitled *Tangled Tales* that is destined to become an instant classic... *Tangled Tales* is one for the time capsule, an accurate document of a player who has ignited a smokin' good time on the planet earth through the better part of the past century. -- *HonestTune.com*

"I was still in high school when Dan Hicks & His Hot Licks' 1971 live album *Where's the Money?* hit the radio and permanently warped my sense of temporal reality. Now, precocious adolescents can get similarly bent hearing Hicks's proprietary blend of western swing, Hawaiian slack-key blues, and gypsy jazz on his new CD, *Tangled Tales*." -- *Village Voice*

"...a seasoned performer working within a wise, swinging dimension all his own." -- *JazzTimes*

"Upbeat and offhanded, Hicks' approach becomes tailor-made for roadhouse revelry with fiddles, mandolin, upright bass and sassy singers providing ideal *accoutrement* for his charismatic croon." -- *Performing Songwriter*

"[Dan Hicks]'s a guy out there on his own musical limb, and this release sure makes you want to join him." -- *San Diego Union Tribune*

"[Dan] has gracefully grown older in a business that typically devours its young." -- *The Republican*

"Dan Hicks is back in the saddle with a dozen new tunes bound to delight longtime fans... *Tangled Tales* has a meaty rack of bebop-style scat vocals worthy of the masters of the genre" -- *BLURT Online*

"Dan Hicks, with his droll wit and Western swing-influenced musical chops still intact 40 years after his debut, is back to his enjoyable tricks on *Tangled Tales*." -- *Detroit Free Press*

"Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks are daring you not to jump up and dance while you listen to *Tangled Tales*, and let me tell you, it's absolutely impossible to stay still...With a dry wit and sharp turn of phrase, [Dan's] rhymes are unusual and often unpredictable, his delivery is delightful, and his timing is impeccable." -- *PopMatters*

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Dan Hicks & the Hot Licks - Dosey Doe - Woodlands, TX – REVIEW
Written by Michael Pittman :: Jan 21, 2012 at 08:00 PM

The thing about never really being IN style is that you never really go OUT of style do you? For over 40 years people have been trying to describe Dan Hicks and for a while there it looked like they might just succeed.

But..in 1973, after having gotten his picture on the cover of the Rolling Stone and released his most successful record yet and just as they thought they had him, he disbanded the Hot Licks and drifted into a low-key solo career. Last Train to Hicksville appeared in 1973 and it wouldn't be until 1978 that Dan would release It Happened One Bite which was a collection of music he wrote for a movie that never got released.

Dan gathered a little steam in the 80s again and formed The Acoustic Warriors, but it wouldn't be until 1994 that he would release the live CD Shootin' Straight. Ever since signing with Surfdog Records in 1998 Dan has been on a comeback with a strong release in 2009's Tangled Tales and 2010's long anticipated Christmas album.

The reformed Hot Licks now consist of Benito Cortez on violin/mandolin/strange glasses, Daria and Roberta Donnay on Vocals/Percussion/synchronized dancing and Paul Smith on bass. Dan Hicks appears as himself on Vocals and Guitar and seems quite happy, though his deadpan expression never left his face. The expression really augmented the regular injections of dry wit and humor that has become synonymous with a Dan Hicks performance.

I won't try to put Hicks into a category just like I wouldn't (or couldn't) put Tom Waits into a category. I will say that the rhythms and the melodies conjure up imagery and moods of different kinds which may be the best way to describe it.

For example, Daria and Roberta (The Lickettes) punch in these wonderful 30's style harmonies and do these sultry dance vignettes that make me think of what smoky, semi-dark speakeasies must have been like. Benito would shift in and out of costumes by putting on or taking off strange sunglasses, but his violin was razor sharp and clean all night. Paul played the straight man and just played clear, dead on bass.

I especially enjoyed the occasional synchronized dancing as Dan led The Lickettes as they turned a lazy circle during I Scare Myself and at one other point in the show that shall go nameless. To go from the Panamanian style Sambas right into I'm An Old Cowhand was the kind of stuff that kept the right at 200 member audience at bay and held their attention.

I can't close out without recommending Darias solo record to you. It's called Feel The Rhythm and if you love jazz and scat singing, you need to check out the phenomenal range Daria has in her voice. It's well produced and very worth putting in your rotation.

All in all, another great show at Dosey Doe in The Woodlands and if you haven't already, visit their website and just take a look at the awesome lineup of upcoming shows. They just keep on keeping on and you'll definitely want to be a part of it.



Dan Hicks & The Hot Licks: *Tangled Tales*

Surfdog Records

The hype around *Tangled Tales* screams "Dan Hicks is back!" Which was the same line when he released *Beatin' The Heat* in 2000 and no doubt *Selected Shorts* four years later. Granted, *Heat* was the singer/songwriter's first new studio album in 22 years. Maybe a more apt grabber this time around would be "Dan Hicks is *still* back" - which is equally remarkable considering his seeming aversion to studios and record labels.

A true pioneer - first in the earliest days of psychedelia, with San Francisco's Charlatans, followed by his lone stance for acoustic swing amid a sea of acid rock - Hicks is responsible for such classics as "I Scare Myself," "Walkin' One And Only," and "How Can I Miss You When You Won't Go Away." His Hot Licks of the early '70s (featuring guitarist John Gorton, violinist Sid Page, and Lickettes Maryann Price and Naomi Eisenberg) were the ultimate in hip and, against all odds, quite popular - and set the stage for acoustic stringers like David Grisman (and, hence, Darol Anger, Mike Marshall, Mark O'Connor, et. al.). As if to give him his due, *Heat* and *Shorts* boasted cameos by devotees and fans, including Tom Waits, Bette Midler, Willie Nelson, Elvis Costello, Brian Setzer, Rickie Lee Jones, and even Butthole Surfer Gibby Haynes.

To his credit, Hicks didn't get lost in the shuffle, but *Tales* sounds more cohesive, and he sounds more at home. Some heavyweights are onboard (mandolinist Grisman, violinist Richard Greene, and blues harpist Charlie Musselwhite), but they supply instrumental support; no vocal duets here. And Dave Bell proves to be all the star power needed on guitar - always an exercise in swing and intricacy with Hicks.

The repertoire is divided equally among covers (from "Ragtime Cowboy Joe" to "Subterranean Homesick Blues"), never-waxed originals from Hicks' past (in the case of "The Rounder," dating back 35-plus years), and assumedly new tunes (including the title tune, which holds up despite having no lyrics, just scatting). Which on the one hand begs the question, "How much writing is Dan doing these days?" while, for longtime fans, also breaths the sigh of relief, "He finally got around to recording that one!"

Dan Forte, June 16, 2010

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#144 ~ November/December 2009

Recordings

DAN HICKS & THE HOT LICKS

Tangled Tales

Surfdog (2008)

Although Dan Hicks played alongside rock stars in the early 1970s, his urbane-cowboy music has always remained outside the mainstream. That renegade streak makes for a remarkably consistent song catalog, especially when he's backed up by the Hot Licks – broken up in 1973 but re-formed in 2000, hopefully for good this time.

On the 12-track *Tangled Tales*, the San Francisco-based singer's 10th studio CD, Hicks reels off songs that are as sly as ever. The party kicks off with "Who Are You?" a rapid-fire swing tune about cheesy pickup lines that mayor may not be successful. A similar toe-tapper is "I3-D," a tale of a man so in love that "there ain't a guy that wouldn't want to be in my shoes" – which, of course, are size 13-D.

The romance theme carries over to the infectious bossa nova "Savin' My Lovin'," and Hicks lets the mask slip a little in "A Magician," a heartfelt ballad about the questions left behind after a crumbled relationship. Both "The Diplomat" and "Let It Simmer!" deal with similar frustrations of modern life; the former has him asking, "Won't somebody just throw me a bone/so I can chew the thing alone?"

Four cover tunes are included here: Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues"; jazz master Horace Silver's Latin-tinged "Song for My Father"; and old chestnuts "The Blues My Naughty Baby Gave to Me" and "Ragtime Cowboy Joe." It's a testament to Hicks' skills as a song interpreter that he really makes these his own, which is no small feat when talking about one of Dylan's iconic tunes.

A good part of the Hot Licks charm is Hicks' call-and-response interaction with the "Lickettes," currently Roberta Donnay and the single-named Daria. Their playful flirting with Hicks recalls Ray Charles' Raylettes as well as many old-time radio shows. Most fun is the album's wordless title track, which showcases Hicks' skat-singing prowess and finds the ladies keeping up with grace and skill. Previous Hicks albums in this millennium have focused on guest vocalists, but *Tangled Tales* chooses instead to feature guest musicians: harmonica player Charlie Musselwhite, slide guitarist Roy Rogers, bluegrass violinist Richard Greene, cowboy-swing guitarist Bruce Forman, and mandolin maestro David Grisman.

Hicks fanatics might be disappointed that five of Hicks' songs on *Tangled Tales* also appeared on *Shootin' Straight*, his 1994 live disc with previous backing band the Acoustic Warriors, but take heart that they are reworked here as classic Hot Licks tunes circa 1971.



Dan Hicks - Tangled in cheesy chestnuts

—Chris Kocher (Vestal, NY)

DAN HICKS AND THE HOT LICKS "Tangled Tales"

Kindred spirits: Django Reinhardt, David Grisman, Leon Redbone

Friday, October 23, 2009 :: washingtonpost.com > Print Edition > Weekend

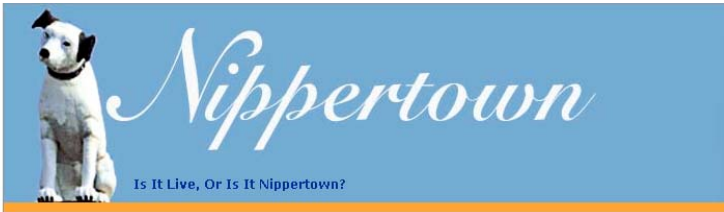
Show: Friday at the Barns at Wolf Trap. Show starts at 8 p.m. 703-938-2404.
<http://www.wolftrap.org>.

Old and new, borrowed and blue, hip and unabashedly sentimental, the tunes that make up "Tangled Tales," the latest release by Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks, are a curious lot, all right, and all the more so after Hicks has had his way with them.

Arguably the drollest of modern-day swingsters, the veteran vocalist and guitarist is dependably engaging when the tempo is slow, while crooning Horace Silver's "Song for My Father"; the album's self-penned coda, "Let It Simmer!"; or, better yet, the languid and yearning blues "A Magician." Yet Hicks and his session mates tend to be at their best when a tune inspires something spirited, along the lines of, say, a scat-laced, stop-time version of "The Blues My Naughty Baby Gave to Me" or a string band sendup of Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues." "The Diplomat," a wry and evocatively harmonized delight composed by Hicks, also ranks among the album's highlights.

As for the Hot Licks, if the ensemble sounds hotter -- and more soulful -- than usual, chalk it up to a guest list that includes mandolinist David Grisman, blues guitarist Roy Rogers, harmonicist Charlie Musselwhite and jazz guitarist Bruce Forman. Small wonder Hicks sounds like he has found himself one big sweet spot of a studio setting this time around.

-- Mike Joyce



LIVE: Dan Hicks & the Hot Licks @ The Egg, 4/23/10

"We understand Dan is in the building," the big man with the untamed duck-tail haircut and weight-challenged Elvis sideburns informed us at the start of the show. "Stay tuned for further developments."

Our helpful announcer was, of course, Dan Hicks, who has been doling out Texas Swing and deadpan humor for over forty-five years, ever since (as he so diplomatically put it) "I was living in San Francisco (and) you were living in Troy!" Regional smackdown aside, the Arkansas native had the eventually-packed Swyer Theatre laughing and clapping from the opening Django Reinhardt instrumental "Avalon" to the easy blues closer "Four or Five Times."

No other performer makes having a good time seem so effortless. That includes the exaggerated choreography he sporadically performed with backup singers Roberta Donnay and Daria. (Yup, that's her real name. No, she wasn't wearing big glasses and Doc Martens.) "We want to be just as relaxed as anyone in the room," Hicks said off-handedly after his hilarious samba send-up of Tom Waits' "The Piano Has Been Drinking (Not Me)." Donnay and Daria did more than provide visual stimuli and 1930s-style background vocals: Their duet on the last administration's unofficial theme song "I'm an Old Cowhand" was dead solid perfect, and they played a myriad number of percussion instruments throughout the set, eliminating any need for a standard drummer.

Hicks couldn't be this laid-back without a tight band, which he definitely has. Benito Cortez's violin jumped out on the Gypsy jazz opener and stayed razor-sharp all evening; guitarist David Bell (who could pass for a life-size bobblehead doll) expertly slipped "Mardi Gras in New Orleans" into the middle of "'Long Come a Viper," and he busted out a sizzling solo on the Hicks classic "I Scare Myself." ("The anthem of a generation," Hicks cracked).



Review by J Hunter
Photographs by Andrzej Pilarczyk

DAN HICKS & THE HOT LICKS SET LIST
Avalon
The Piano Has Been Drinking (Not Me)
The Blues My Naughty Baby
'Long Come a Viper
Beedle-Um-Bum
I'm an Old Cowhand (From the Rio Grande)
I Scare Myself
Milk Shakin' Mama – with John Hammond
He Don't Care (He's Stoned)
Evenin' Breeze
ENCORE
Four or Five Times



Photo Credit: Robotclaw666
Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks performed at Wealthy Theatre Thursday.

Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks come to G.R.

Submitted: Mar 12th, 2010

by Ken Tamke under LOCAL LIFE

A most joyous noise echoed within the walls of the Community Media Center's Wealthy Theatre Thursday evening. Singer-songwriter-wry lyricist Dan Hicks was in town presented by radio station WYCE with the latest incarnation of his Hot Licks. Perhaps a couple of seats were available here and there, but for the most part the auditorium was packed in anticipation of Mr. Hicks' quirky vocals, superior musicianship, and good-ol'-timey sound that has punctuated his 45+ years in the music business.

No signs of being worse for the wear from Hicks. His charmingly nasal tenor voice melds as seamlessly with backup vocalists, the Lickettes, as it did in the early 70's. His onstage banter and off-handed remarks complemented the sometimes comedic and humorous nature of his songs.

After some minor sound adjustments the band swung right into action opening the first set with A Sammy Cahn jump tune, "Chattanooga Shoe-Shine Boy." The Lickettes: Roberta Donnay, and Daria, demonstrated from their first notes the wonderful harmonies and flawless vocal arrangements the audience was in store for. In addition to their vocalese, the girls would prove to be impressive percussionists as they pulled gadget after gizmo out of their trick bag throughout the night.

In the only instrumental selection of the evening, the Lickmen, so dubbed by Hicks, had a chance to stretch out and deliver a bit of their own magic. Virtuoso musicians all, this trio was reminiscent of many that Hicks has surrounded himself with during his career. David Bell took the first turn with a Django-esque interpretation on his amplified acoustic guitar. Bell would wow the audience on several occasions, bending strings, playing a mean slide and in general, with his mastery of his instrument. Benito Cortez, in what he would intimate later was only his second live gig with Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks played Grappelli on his fiddle to Bell's Django on guitar without missing a beat. Paul Smith took the third solo and provided the bottom end all night long.

He plucked, strummed, bowed and slapped his amplified upright bass keeping everything tight. And, one can certainly not forget about Hicks. He pantomimed later in the evening, imagining himself the soloist. Replete with distorted facial expressions, Hicks played just one or two notes in succession, his self deprecating humor evident while Bell absolutely tore it up in the background, Hicks taking the credit. But, make no mistake about humble Hicks, his stellar rhythm guitar, his vocal and musical arrangements and his lyrics are what create this Gypsy, folk, country jazz musical stew and make it so engaging.

In a tribute to Tom Waits, the Hot Licks covered "The Piano Has Been Drinking," with Hicks taking one of his many vocal solos. For my money the 2000, Surfdog Records release containing this cover entitled "Beatin' the Heat" is one of Hicks' best efforts ever. The purists however, (of which I consider myself one) will never forget the series of albums that came out in the early 70's. Hicks indulged our nostalgic sweet tooth with "I Scare Myself" and "Canned Music" from his 1971 MCA release "Striking it Rich," Daria contributing some nice work on the Mellodica. "The Buzzard Was Their Friend" from 71's "Where's the Money," got a wonderful jump blues treatment, "I Feel Like Singing," a scatting duel between the girls. And finally "Sweetheart," from the '73 effort "Last Train to Hicksville," featured the wonderfully campy lyrics for which Hicks is known and tailor-made vocals from the Lickettes.

The two most amusing selections came after intermission late in the show. The Hot Licks cover of "Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen's hit, "Smoke That Cigarette" drew a rousing applause. The inclusion of quintessential jazz pianist Horace Silver's "Song for my Father" was a beautiful departure from standard Hot Licks fare and featured a round of solos from the rhythm section and a vocal chorus in Spanish from the girls.

Four hundred happy souls bumped along into the rainy night riding on the wave of Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks' infectious melodies.

I would be remiss to mention local favorite Ralston Bowles who opened the show and delivered a fine and passionate set, but for this fan, the night belonged to Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks.



Reaview
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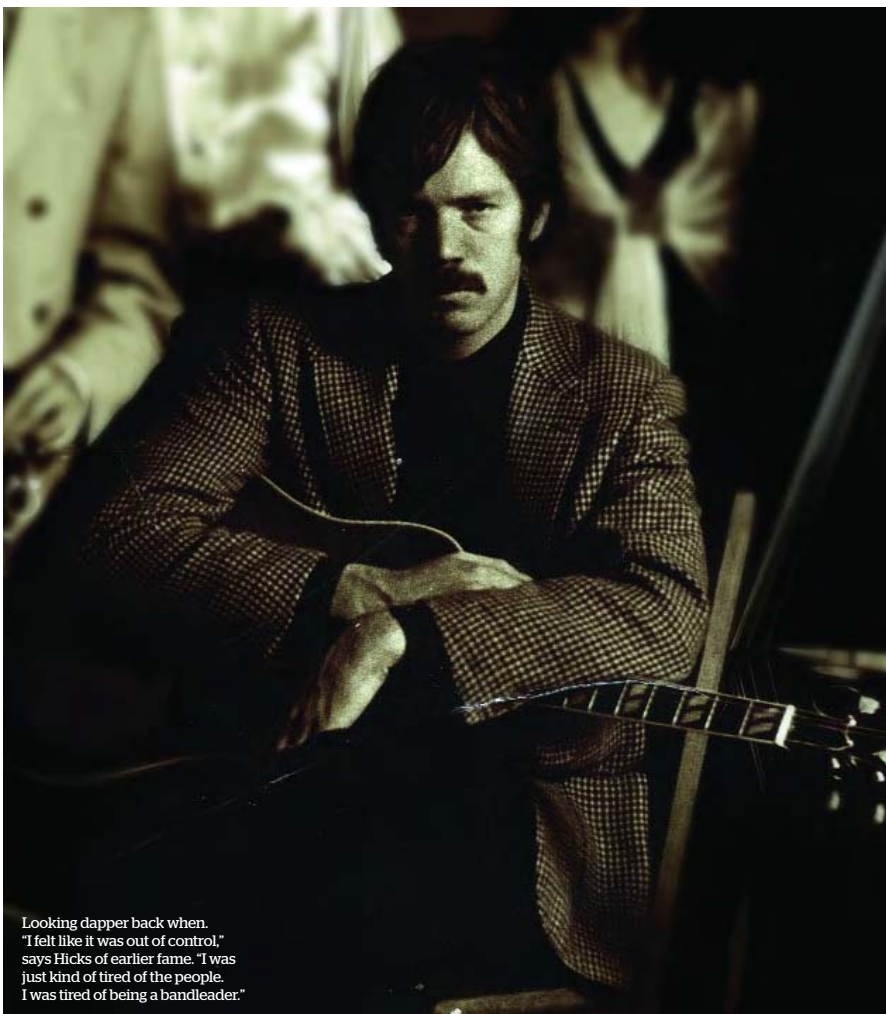
Dan Hicks

Some 45 years into his career, the multi-faceted musician is still wonderfully indefinable // By Jeff Tamarkin

THE LEAD TRACK on *Tangled Tales*, the new album by Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks, asks a question that many have wondered about the artist himself: "Who Are You?"

For some 45 years now, Hicks has defied easy categorization and operated outside of the mainstream. He started out as a solo folkie, morphed into a drummer for the pioneering Bay Area psychedelic band The Charlatans and switched to guitar—only to bolt and start his own acoustic, drummerless band.

That would be the aforementioned Hot Licks (then called *His* Hot Licks—he's since relinquished possession), an off-and-on project since the late '60s. And there's truly never been another band like it: Tossing together Western swing, gypsy jazz, jug band, cowboy and bluegrass music with folk, bossa nova and call-and-response vocals from backing singers, The Lickettes. Hicks' thoroughly original songwriting, undeniable style, impeccable musicianship, bagsful of sardonic humor and plenty of



Looking dapper back when. "I felt like it was out of control," says Hicks of earlier fame. "I was just kind of tired of the people. I was tired of being a bandleader."

defiance, gained notice in a rock-centric music world and the band flourished—for a few years.

Hicks then broke up the group, only to re-form it with mostly new members, and then disband again—right after appearing on the cover of *Rolling Stone*. Since then, Dan Hicks has drifted in and out of the scene, doing this and doing that—and finally reactivating the Licks with all new members as the 20th century came to a close. *Tangled Tales* (Surfdog) is as impressive as any of the releases from the original band(s).

"The other albums I did on this label were a little overproduced. I didn't have total control," says Hicks candidly. "They put in some gimmicky sounds and compressed this or that. They were going for a wider audience or some kind of noise. [On] this one, they just let me and the producer [Chris Goldsmith] come up with how it's gonna sound. That—I like."

Some of the songs on *Tangled Tales* appeared previously on *Shootin' Straight*, an album that Hicks released with his band Acoustic Warriors in '94. "But I hadn't really given those songs a full treatment with [The Lickettes] and the new instrumental ensemble and arrangements," he says, explaining why he recut those tunes. Besides, he adds, *Shootin' Straight* was a very limited release, almost like a bootleg album that only people in Belgium have. So it's sort of an untapped resource."

A spirited cover of Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues" and a reimagining of Horace Silver's jazz classic "Song for My Father," with lyrics grafted onto the previously instrumental tune in the '70s by singer Leon Thomas, are among the other tracks.

In addition to the current lineup—Lickettes Roberta Donnay and the single-monikered Daria, violinist Richard Chon, guitarist Dave Bell, bassist Paul Smith and drummer Brian Simpson—*Tangled Tales* also benefits from a succession of guest artists that anyone would welcome on a record: David Grisman on mandolin, Charlie Musselwhite on harmonica, Roy Rogers on guitar and Richard Greene on violin. The group's sound is remarkably consistent with the music that Hicks was making with the original Hot Licks some 40 years ago.

Before that, though, there was the notorious group The Charlatans, formed in 1964, which many considered to be the first San Francisco rock band of note. Hicks joined the band the following year, and was a member when the group played the historic ballroom dances in San Francisco and at the legendary Red Dog Saloon in Virginia City, Nev.—where just about anything could

happen, and often did. "There was a little bit of gun fire in the club, and one time when we found a tombstone on the stage. I was 23 and they could fuck themselves, you know? The club was closed on Mondays," Hicks adds. "So that was the day we took acid."

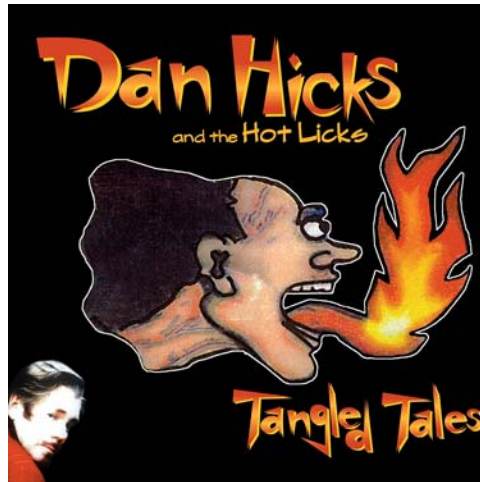
Unlike the other major San Francisco bands, The Charlatans' recording output was tiny, so aural evidence is hard to come by—it's all been collected on a single CD by the British Big Beat label. That, and the band's penchant for dressing in Old West garb, has caused some historians to diminish the band's contribution. Hicks disagrees.

"The one thing that I read [about us] sometimes," he says, "and it seems to be perpetrated, is that 'they couldn't play their instruments.' That's not fair. We could play. I would say that the band wasn't consistent—wasn't always that good," he admits. "And also, we never went anywhere, other than Denver, Vancouver and L.A."

Hicks left The Charlatans to form The Hot Licks in 1968, releasing four albums—*Original Recordings* (1969), *Where's the Money?* (1971), *Striking It Rich* (1972) and *Last Train to Hicksville* (1973)—that all hold up today. His best compositions—among them "I Scare Myself," "Canned Music" and the oft-referred-to "How Can I Miss You When You Won't Go Away?"—are considered to be acoustic classics. But true to his renegade nature, Hicks disbanded the group at the peak of its popularity. "I felt like it was out of control," he says. "I was just kind of tired of the people. I was tired of being a bandleader. I just didn't want to do it anymore."

Fortunately, for all of us, now he does. ●





Dan Hicks & the Hot Licks :: Tangled Tales (Surfdog)

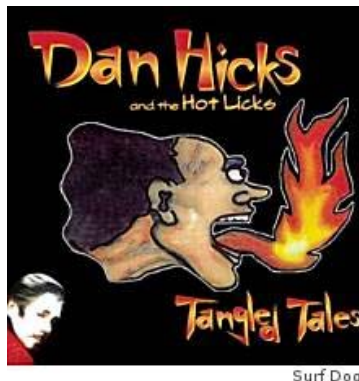
Review By Mitch Myers

Dan Hicks has been working as a deadpan hipster for more than 40 years, and he has the scars to prove it. Making records since 1969, usually accompanied by various configurations of Hot Licks, Hicks shrewdly melds hot gypsy jazz, country swing, folk, blues, beat and bluegrass, all without ever breaking a sweat. On his latest collection, Hicks balances solid original compositions against a few well-chosen covers. His droll vocal delivery is smooth, fast and confident (he even scats), and the backing voices of Lick-ettes Roberta Donnay and the surname-free Daria never leave him too exposed.

He also swings on rhythm guitar and is nimbly supported by guitarist Dave Bell, violinist Richard Chon, string bassist Paul Smith and drummer Brian Simpson. Besides cool tunes and a hot band, this disc showcases the talents of notable guests like mandolinist David Grisman, guitarists Roy Rogers and Bruce Forman, and harmonica veteran Charlie Musselwhite. One of the more sensitive moments here is a vocal rendition of Horace Silver's "Song for My Father," replete with a winsome verse sung in Spanish near the end. Another smart cover is the arrangement of Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues," a dizzying romp requiring an exacting surplus of vocal and instrumental control. None of which should take away from Hicks' abilities as a songwriter and song stylist. Idiosyncratic originals like "Who Are You," "The Diplomat," "13-D" and the title track all reveal Hicks to be a seasoned performer working within a wise, swinging dimension all his own.

San Francisco Chronicle

CD: Dan Hicks, 'Tangled Tales'



Surf Dog

Ben Fong-Torres

Sunday, April 26, 2009

RADIO WAVES



Pretty much every band that came out of the "San Francisco scene" of the '60s has gone the way of the waterbed, but Dan Hicks, he of the Charlatans and Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks, soldiers on. Actually, he swings on, with occasional shifts in the cast around him. The one constant, over 40 years, is the man and his hard-to-define, even tougher-to-resist music. It's jazz and country swing, it's Lambert, Hendricks & Ross (courtesy of chipper chirpers Roberta Donnay and Daria); it's Grappelli and Django, plus jingles, along with witty lyrics, lovely harmonies, tight playing and some bebop scatting that would do Ella Fitzgerald proud. Hicks - who composed such rhetorical classics as "How Can I Miss You When You Won't Go Away?" and "Where's the Money?" - is in top form in "Tangled Tales," a dozen cool cuts, by turns bluesy and bouncy (including a dazzling cover of "Subterranean Homesick Blues.") Look for the limited-edition package, including both a vinyl and a compact disc, leaving only one question: Where's the MP3?

DAN HICKS AND THE HOT LICKS
TANGLED TALES
SURF DOG
\$13.98

This article appeared on page *R - 38* of the San Francisco Chronicle

DAN HICKS & HIS HOT LICKS

Swinger.

by David Smay

9

Title: "I Feel Like Singing"

Artist: Dan Hicks & His Hot Licks

Written by: Dan Hicks

Produced by: Tommy LiPuma

Credited Musicians: Dan Hicks (lead vocals, guitar), Maryann Price (vocals, percussion), Naomi Ruth Eisenberg (vocals, percussion, second fiddle), Sid Page (violin, mandolin, occasional harmony), Jaime Leopold (bass)

From the Album: *Where's the Money?* (1990). First released in 1971 on Blue Thumb Records.

Publisher Credits: Great Guns Publishing Co. (ASCAP)

Courtesy of: Geffen (MCA), under license from Universal Music Group

Special Thanks: Dan Hicks, Tricia Tierno, Allison Sundberg, Clare Wasserman



The worst marketing firm in the world put Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks together by committee—that's the only possible explanation for a San Francisco band in 1968 taking their inspiration from Glenn Miller's vocal group, the Modernaires: "You know what the kids want today? Big-band group harmonies and cowboy songs! No drummer, though, and no electric instruments. We'll sell a million!" Perhaps one other plausible explanation involving massive

drug use. But it wasn't marketing or LSD that produced Dan Hicks; it was Arkansas.

The wry and dapper swing music that Dan Hicks created pulls from sources more humid than those found in his Northern California childhood. Depending on how much credence you put in geographical destiny, Hicks's 1941 birth in Little Rock, Arkansas, is either incidental—an Army brat passing through—or deeply significant. Logic dictates that we distinguish correlation from causation, but

logic never looked at the list of musicians born within the circle encompassing Little Rock and Memphis: Johnny Cash, Aretha Franklin, Muddy Waters, B.B. King, Howlin' Wolf, Conway Twitty, Levon Helm, Al Green, Louis Jordan, Charlie Rich, Ike Turner, and, of course, the man who stands above them all as an icon of the Mississippi Delta blues and all it has meant to American music, Justin Timberlake.

The family Hicks moved to Santa Rosa,

which is north of San Francisco, when Dan was five. By fourteen, Dan Hicks was a self-proclaimed “jazzier” and played drums in the Dixieland Dudes. In the late ‘50s, working through the Santa Rosa musicians’ union, he gigged through his teen years. A digression is required here, because this is a lost cranny of American pop-music history. Nobody hired full bands for their weddings and bar mitzvahs back then; they’d contact the local musicians’ union hall and a band would be assembled from a call list of available players. You ordered your band like it was Chinese food: “I’ll need a drummer, a vibes player, and two girl singers. Do you have any oboe players? No? Okay, I’ll take an accordionist.” Even if they’d never met before, these interchangeable cogs were expected to mesh and play a standard repertoire together. Instant bands capable of ranging from “Take Five” to “Tutti Frutti” were deployed. This is a bizarrely appealing idea that deserves revival. Imagine them arriving at your garden party, the bored teenagers and embittered middle-aged indie rockers and gray ponytails grinding through Nine Inch Nails golden oldies and OutKast’s greatest hits.

Dan landed at San Francisco State University in the early ‘60s in time for the folk-music scene. As he began to write songs, he learned to play guitar with a drummer’s impeccable sense of rhythm. He and a friend toured the local coffeehouses as Dick and Dan, slogging nightly through “Tom Dooley” and urging Michael to row his boat ashore. Then, almost by accident, Dan and his friends helped invent the San Francisco scene. (Because these things are never tidy, they did it in Nevada.)

One of the signal satisfactions of middle age comes from decrying the shallow, overhyped, image-driven contemporary-music scene and lauding the *realness* of music from one’s youth. Let us forgo that warm, smug sensation, but still celebrate Dan’s bandmate, the dandy who jumpstarted the ‘60s. George Hunter was one of the great aesthetes of the decade, and he put his band, the Charlatans, together almost as an art project. An architecture student at San Francisco State, his circle overlapped with Dan Hicks’s circle at a time when the Charlatans needed a drummer. In the spring of 1965, they decamped to Virginia City, Nevada, and the Red Dog Saloon, which hired them as house band after an acid-dosed audition. They hollered and thumped their way through something between folk and frat rock laced with jug band.

Hunter barely played music, actually, and contented himself with plinking away at an

autoharp on the side of the stage, while looking enigmatic and stylish in a waistcoat, fob, and gambler’s hat. The Charlatans raided thrift shops and shot hundreds of publicity stills and had a look that stirred up excited interest in San Francisco even before the band played there. Davin Seay describes the impact: “George Hunter took paisley, Victoriana, Maxfield Parrish, Marvel Comics, the Wild West, and rock & roll and synthesized something so unique, so patently new and wonderfully appropriate that it overnight became the *de rigueur* aesthetic of San Francisco’s flowering Golden Age.”

The Charlatans sparked the San Francisco scene and then neglected to put out an album until it had bypassed them. From ‘65 to ‘68, while the Charlatans played regularly around San Francisco, Dan Hicks worked up an opening act. At first, it was just himself on acoustic guitar, David LaFlamme on violin, and Jamie Leopold on upright bass. Then, inspired by the popular pop-bossa act Brazil ‘66 (best known for the hit “Mas Que Nada”), Dan envisioned two girls upfront on vocals. Sherry Snow and Tina Gancher were recruited to look fetching and sing harmonies (in that order).

In 1968, Hicks officially split off with his own band, Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks. Just weeks before the recording dates for their debut, violinist LaFlamme left to start It’s a Beautiful Day. Fortunately, Hicks took his mom out for a birthday lunch around that same time only to experience Sid Page playing light classical over their shrimp cocktails. Hicks hired him on the spot. Page, a former classical prodigy, had never played jazz before but brought impeccable chops to the group. He’d learn on the job. The Santa Rosa musicians’ union would have approved.

Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks put out their first album on Epic in 1969. While many music fans prefer an artist’s debut record to everything that comes after, there is wide agreement among Hot Licks fans that *Original Recordings* was a dry run. The songs were already there—Mose Allison would’ve happily claimed “How Can I Miss You When You Won’t Go Away?” But the harmony singers on the debut came from a folkie tradition that sounds stiff and wobbly against Hicks’s fleet, jazzy chords. *Original Recordings* isn’t without charm. It comes fully stocked with out-of-leftfield compositions like “Shorty Takes a Dive” (Hicks’s meditation on the fish he’s about to eat) and “The Jukies’ Ball” (as introduced by Jimmy the Ventriloquist Dummy). Nevertheless, the first album tanked and Epic declined to release their second album.

Dan re-jiggered the lineup, first finding Maryann Price and then Naomi Eisenberg as his new girl singers, and signed with the independent label Blue Thumb. He retained Jamie Leopold on bass, and ace violinist “Symphony” Sid Page. For the second album, *Striking It Rich*, they added John Gorton on lead guitar, and for *The Last Train to Hicksville*, their third album, the drummer Bob Scott. The difference between the inaugural lineup of the Hot Licks and the group assembled for the albums on Blue Thumb is the difference between a decent hippie jug band and a band that delights in, and builds on, virtuosity.

“I Feel Like Singing” leads off *Where’s the Money?* (1971). They whip through the quick tempo, zinging harmonies, and repartee, swooping in and out of the lyrics, the fiddle and the rhythm guitar snapping them along and the bass just barely keeping them anchored. They’re flying high without a net; it’s a live album. A curious decision by the label until you hear how both loose and exact they are, like a nimble five-way juggling act.

To record *Where’s the Money?*, they premiered an entire album of Hicks originals live at the Troubadour, a Los Angeles club. Dan Hicks has a sly trick that forces music writers to contradict themselves and reference imaginary collaborations that never happened. “Ahhh, yes, this is from João Gilberto’s bossa nova tribute album to Bob Wills” and “I remember that Ellington small combo with Stuff Smith on violin and Charlie Christian doing cartoon music for *Betty Boop*.” Is this music original and unprecedented, or is it an instantly accessible mix of pre-rock pop styles? Yes, it isn’t. No, it is!

You can hear the Modernaires call-and-response vocals (they were the ones singing “Pardon me, boy/Is that the Chattanooga Choo Choo?” with the Andrews Sisters) between Dan and the girls. Sometimes it sounds weirdly like cowboy bossa nova, other times like hippified, thrift-shop Boswells. It swings like the Light Crust Doughboys, but the acoustic guitar paired with the jazz violin recalls Django Reinhardt’s duets with Stéphane Grapelli. The nearest recent analogue would probably be the jaunty, Franco gypsy-jazz soundtrack for *The Triplets of Belleville*. Except with loopier lyrics and a Western-wear fetish.

Striking It Rich continues in the same vein, adding John Gorton’s stylish, tasteful lead guitar. Here the Hot Licks balance their blithe, rhythmic goofs with “I Scare Myself,” which debuted on *Original Recordings* but receives

its definitive treatment here. Sid Page's extended violin solo over Hicks's hypnotic composition soars and swings, obsessive, gorgeous, and mesmerizing—a masterpiece. Twelve years later, Thomas Dolby, of all people, would cover it. On songs like “News from up the Street” (*Where's the Money?*), “Moody Richard (the Innocent Bystander)” (*Striking It Rich*), and “It's Not My Time to Go” (*Last Train to Hicksville*), Hicks twists sour jazz chords into ominous pop songs, teasing out a darker strand to offset the playfulness.

Judging by the ratio of songwriters to brilliant songs, songwriting is the hardest stunt in the business. But in just three years, Dan Hicks wrote a ridiculous number of great songs that are as witty musically as they are lyrically. Out of his bent sensibility, and laid down by a band of near limitless range, the Hot Licks produced gem after gem: “Reelin' Down,” “Dig a Little Deeper,” “The Buzzard Was Their Friend,” “My Old Timey Baby,” “Where's the Money,” “Canned Music,” “Cowboy's Dream No. 19.”

Then, in 1974, after three albums and three years of hard touring, with each album charting higher than the last, and on the verge of mainstream success, Dan Hicks broke up the band. He moved down to Los Angeles and into the Tropicana Motel, where he had a nodding acquaintance with Tom Waits. He had signed up to do the score for Ralph Bakshi's animated movie *Hey Good Lookin'*. He finished work on that album in 1975, but the album wasn't released until 1978, and was never used as the movie score. Titled *It Happened One Bite*, it's yet another brilliant, breezy slice of Hicksiana. After that Hollywood disappointment, Dan Hicks decided to take a vacation. It lasted twenty years.

Maryann talked Dan and *Austin City Limits* into a reunion show in 1992, and all the Hot Licks showed up. They still had that exquisite telepathy. Before and afterwards, Dan Hicks gigged around the Bay Area, bothering to release a CD by his Acoustic Warriors in 1994. His chops were intact, his voice was even better, he'd dried out and cleaned up, and his songwriting remained quirky and vital. But without the Hot Licks, without Maryann and Naomi as his foils, the music felt merely two-dimensional.

In 2000, Dan recorded *Beatin' the Heat*, his first album with the Hot Licks since 1973. He got what he called two session singers to back him up, which understates their credits considerably. His new singers were Karla deVito, the singer who famously squared off against Meat Loaf in the video for “Paradise by the

Dashboard Light,” and Jessica Harper, a star in such film classics as *Suspiria*, *The Phantom of the Paradise*, *Pennies From Heaven*, and *Stardust Memories*.

According to Boyle's Law, “For a fixed amount of gas kept at a fixed temperature, comeback albums suck, particularly when they feature big name guests.” There were some very big names on the album: Tom Waits, Rickie Lee Jones (one can't help but imagine them crooning “Old Timey Baby” to each other over breakfast at the Duke's Coffee Shop in 1977), Brian Setzer, and Bette Midler. Defying the laws of physics, Dan Hicks made a great album. When he remade “I Scare Myself” with Rickie Lee, he didn't coast on the original, but created a true duet, an intimate little chase movie through the narrow streets of an Algerian medina. The duet with Tom Waits, “I'll Tell You Why That Is,” is an almost perfect marriage of complementary brain stems, filled with bluesy barstool jibes. Brian Setzer gooses “I Don't Want Love” with rockabilly runs while Dan ticks off all the reasons why onion rings and sushi trump love. Most improbably, Dan coaxes a vocal out of Bette Midler that's sweeter, easier, jazzier, and lighter than anything she's recorded in thirty years. She just floats over one of his patented Latin gallops.

Dan Hicks might be the laziest genius the music industry has ever produced. He could have been making albums like this all along. He roused himself to do it again on *Selected Shorts*, which came out in 2004.

Nobody's ever come up with a proper label for Dan Hicks. That's partly because he leapt over the vast jazz divide created by bop. Bebop subdivided the rhythm and broke the melody into cubist fragments until swing was something you did between your ears instead of out on the dance floor. But there was a time from the '20s through the '40s when swing—“hot rhythm”—rippled through every form of popular music. That's the music Dan Hicks plays, and there's no single word for it because it wasn't limited to any one genre. Django Reinhardt and the Mills Brothers and Spade Cooley and Hank Garland and the Boswell Sisters and Stuff Smith and Bing Crosby all swing. You can make yourself nutty trying to define what Dan Hicks is. Then again, you could just say: Dan Hicks swings. And while he may be an idler and a roué, nobody's written ten better songs about breezing down the road than Dan Hicks. And in the rarefied genre of songs about buzzards and bacon grease, well, he's the master. 🦅