

An Interview with Eric Darius
November 19, 2005 on the Carnival Conquest cruising in rough
waters east of Mexico
Interviewed by Susan Johnson

At 22, Eric Darius has just released his second record, ***Night on the Town***, and has been touring not only with his own band, but with Brian Culbertson. He has his head on straight and is the future of smooth jazz... something this genre needs. Eric was on the All Star Cruise and joined in on many of the panel discussions and meet and greets when he wasn't on stage playing.

Smooth Views (SV): Your family is very musical! So you decided to have a solo career rather than join the Darius Family Band? Tell us how they contribute to your CDs.

Eric Darius (ED): (laughs) They have actually contributed quite a bit. My dad is my manager, so he takes a very active role in terms of my performances and everything. We actually did have a family band at one point! I was about 12 years old and my dad played the bass, my mom sang and played the piano, my sister sang and played the piano and my brother played the drums. So the whole family was involved. But I guess by the time I turned 14, I took it really seriously and I wanted to have a solo career so I kind of broke from that. My family is still very involved in everything I do. My sister will sing with me every once in awhile and my mom and my sister are both on my last CD singing background vocals. So the family is still very involved in my music career. I'm the middle child. I have an older brother who is 25 and a younger sister who is 20.

SV: Tell us a little about your writing process for Night on the Town. Do you hear music all the time and write it down or do you have to be in a certain space? Do you write on piano or sax?

ED: It's funny. When I write the music, it just kind of comes to me. I can't really sit down and tell myself... I'm going to write a song right now... because it really doesn't happen that way. So I'm constantly hearing different things in my head, different songs and different melodies. I write a lot of my music while I'm in my car, just driving. I turn the music off... wow, I like that... and so I start thinking of some stuff. I have a little tape recorder that I keep in my car and I'll just hum a little melody on my tape recorder. Then I'll take it with me later on and put it down and put a song together. So it happens that way... and it happens a lot when I'm in the shower! Just taking a shower and relaxing and I just think of some melodies that come along. But music is constantly going around in my head. I might think of a song while I'm talking to you right now! (laughs) It just happens that way. I try to write it down immediately. Sometimes it will just come in my head once and it will never come back, so if I don't get a chance to capture it right away then it's lost. Most of the time, though, that same melody will stay in my head until I get a chance to write it down and really put a song together.

SV: Tell me a little bit about the recording process for your new CD.

ED: I had six songs that I had written and then I collaborated with Ken Navarro on two songs and we put that together. I have tons of other songs in addition to those six, but those are the ones that I actually had written down and ready for the CD. Ken produced the whole CD. It was incredible. I had such fun working with Ken Navarro. He's a great person and he's a great musician. He has such a good sense... not just for music and songwriting, but also for producing. He has a great ear. It was just a wonderful experience working with him. I actually opened up for him in Tampa, FL. We were both performing and after the show I had a chance to sit down and talk with him. He was very interested in working with me, so I called him maybe two months later. I had some music for him and we started working together. Altogether, the project took about three months between the recording, the mixing and the mastering. So the whole CD was done in about three months.

SV: You have been on tour quite a bit lately with Brian Culbertson and on this cruise. Are you on break from school or continuing through independent study?

ED: What I was actually trying this semester was online classes. And that seemed to work pretty well. I can't be in class five days a week between traveling with Brian, traveling with my band, and recording, which has been really intense the past couple of months, so I tried online classes the beginning of this semester in August. But it just got to the point where I couldn't do it. I mean, I tried because I really want to finish my studies to get my degree. So I did take this semester off. I took three classes online, but I ended up dropping them because I just couldn't handle it. I don't want to sacrifice my grades because I usually make straight A's so I want to keep that same expectation for myself. So I did have to drop a couple of classes, but I do think it's worked out for the better so I can focus on putting my new CD together. I do plan on taking some classes next semester.

I'm a senior at University at South Florida and my major is marketing. I started out studying music and then once I got signed up with the record label and started traveling, I'm like... what am I doing studying music? I'm performing. I'm doing what I want to be doing with music. So much of the music industry is business so I figured the marketing side would assist me more in my music career than anything else.

SV: Your music has been described as "crisp and very tasty." How did you develop your technique and your stage presence?

ED: Just a lot of years of experience! I would practice constantly on my own, just practicing in my room hours at a time... when I actually did have that time... when I was a lot younger... just getting first-hand experience playing with different bands, traveling, watching a lot of other people perform. When I was about 12 or 13 years old, I would watch all of these incredible artists... Richard Elliott, Paul Taylor, David Sanborn, Dave Koz... I

would watch all these guys perform and take what I saw with me and try to incorporate some of that stuff into my own playing. Then after performing so much I just kind of developed my own style of performing, my own technique and that's just really how it happened. Now I've met just about everyone [I used to watch] and it's just incredible.

SV: *It's unusual to see a young person as yourself getting into smooth jazz. Why did you choose smooth jazz instead of straight-ahead or R&B?*

ED: Actually, I love R&B and I love straight-ahead jazz. I love pop, rock, reggae... anything you can think of, I love those different types of music. And I think all of those different styles of music have combined together in my style because I incorporate so many different styles. I grew up listening to jazz. My parents exposed me to it at a very young age. So, I've always had just a passion for jazz. I play straight-ahead. It's really my foundation, but smooth jazz is something that really people... the audience... can communicate with. They can really relate to it, so that's something about smooth jazz that I like. I love performing smooth jazz.

SV: *What do you think the future of smooth jazz is?*

ED: I really don't know. I'm really curious to see where it will end up in the future. Jazz evolves every so often, so I have no clue! I'm just going to continue writing music and continue performing and I guess we'll see what direction it goes. It's just going to be a natural process.

SV: *How does your faith affect your music?*

ED: Tremendously! I started out playing in church before I played anywhere else. There's something about playing in church that's completely different than playing anywhere else. There's just something about the spirituality that just comes through me when I'm playing and I feel like I'm just not even playing for people. It's just something that's inside of me, you know, so the spiritual side of me has taken a very major role in my playing. A lot of people come up to me and say, "You play with so much soul and passion. How do you do that?" I'm like, "It's not me. I'm just blessed. It's just a talent that God gave to me and I'm using my talents and every time I step on that stage it just shines through." So, it's just amazing.

SV: *Who are some of your musical influences?*

ED: There's been so many! Like I said, I listen to a lot of traditional jazz so I love listening to John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Cannonball Adderley, Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis. I listen to a lot of contemporary jazz artists... David Sanborn, Kirk Whalum, Grover Washington, Jr., Kenny Garrett, Michael Brecker. I listen to a lot of pop, a lot of R&B. I love Earth, Wind & Fire, Stevie Wonder... I mean there is such a wide range of so many different influences and that's why I can appreciate so many different styles of music.

I took lessons for about eight months with my first teacher. It was actually

one of the people who inspired me to start playing the saxophone. I saw him playing the saxophone at church every week and I told my mom and dad it was just amazing what he was doing. I mean, the saxophone is such a beautiful instrument, but just the soul and emotion he played with, it really touched me. I wanted to be able to do the same exact thing, so I took lessons with him for about eight months and after that he said he couldn't teach me anything else because I learned so quickly. I took lessons with a lady for another six or seven months and that was the only formal training I've had. I was 10 years old then so by the time I was about 11 or 12, everything I played I just learned on my own. I didn't start with clarinet! So many saxophone players start with clarinet. I tried clarinet but I couldn't do it. It just wasn't for me, but I do play the flute also so that helps a lot with technique. I also play the piano. I write sometimes on piano but I mostly write on the saxophone. It is a lot easier with the piano because you can visualize all the chords. A lot of guys write on the piano, so I try to use that.

SV: You're building your first home? How involved have you been in the process and are you enjoying it?

ED: Every time I'm in town I'll stop by and see how the house is progressing. It's just one of the most amazing feelings. Just knowing that I've done well enough that I can get my own home is just such a proud accomplishment. Watching the whole building process... it's so amazing how they do it. I'm just excited about it. I'm very proud to be able to say I can buy my first home at 22 years old. The house is supposed to be done next week! As a matter of fact, the day we get back [from the cruise], I'll be closing the following day. It's just tons of excitement everywhere! We got to pick out the carpet color, the paint colors, the cabinets, everything. I kind of customized it in a way, so it's exactly what I wanted. It's beautiful! I have to furnish the whole entire place. I'm living at home with my parents right now, so this is my first time breaking away completely. So it's exciting! It's been so much fun!

SV: Do you get much opportunity to play basketball these days?

ED: Unfortunately, I don't. I used to play basketball just about every single day. I used to work out in the gym just about every day, but once I started traveling about eight months ago it started to change a little bit. Just the whole traveling thing. Once I get home, the last thing I want to do is run around and play basketball. I usually just want to relax. Every now and then, I get to play, but that's my second love to music. I played in high school and played in a bunch of different leagues so I love to play. I still try to do that every now and then. A lot of the conditioning for playing on stage came from playing basketball! A lot of people ask where I get all that energy from... once you hit that stage, it's a whole other thing. I think a lot of it came from me being athletic... being on the track team, the soccer team, and the basketball team.

SV: *What do you do for fun?*

ED: I definitely love to play basketball! I go to the gym... spending time with my girlfriend... watching movies, just relaxing. I don't usually get to do that, so I just try to sit back, relax and enjoy myself. I'm performing quite a bit with Brian Culbertson and my band over the holidays, but I will make some time to just relax!

SV: *Anything else you would like your fans to know about you?*

ED: I'm just really blessed to have the opportunity to do what I'm doing. I've really accomplished a lot at such a young age and I've been very, very fortunate. One of the reasons why I enjoy doing what I'm doing is because of the fans. It just brings so much joy to my life. I just feel so blessed to do what I enjoy and get paid for it and have everyone else enjoy my music. One of my goals has always been to make people happy and bring smiles to their faces when I step on that stage. My goal is to just make a difference in people's lives and I feel like I'm starting to touch lives, one by one. I plan on doing this for the rest of my life.

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