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JULY 2025

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Killer Flamingos: Darren Drake

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Photo by Michelle Laskowski, Portraits with Michelle

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RESIDENT FEATURE — By James Mangiapane, Jr. • Photos by Michelle Laskowski, Portraits with Michelle





Today, we interview Darren Drake, member of and keyboardist for the well-known band, Killer Flamingos (killerflamingos.com). The band covers Top 40 across the decades, from the 80's to current hits, with some Motown and other familiar favorites sprinkled in. Their considerable versatility, combined with off-the-chart levels of crowd interaction has kept the Flamingos at the top of fan voted lists like Hour Detroit Magazine's "Best Band" and WDIV's Click On Detroit's "Best Local Band" for numerous years since 2008. They recently received the Metro Times "Best Cover Band" distinction and Hour Detroit's "Best of Detroit" mention.'

So you grew up here in Troy?
I'm an Athens alumni (1987) and I got my Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations from Wayne State University in 1993. Then I joined the Killer Flamingos Band in 1994, so I never had to get a "Day Job." I stay up late and like to sleep in so it worked out perfectly!

So you now do public relations through music?
Yeah, something like that.

Do you have any family here?

I have a sister, Renee, and a brother, Frank. They both attended Troy Athens High School as well. However, they were much older than me and I felt more like an only child at times.

We all grew up in the Mount Vernon subdivision across from Athens High School. When my mother died we sold the house. I recently bought a place off Stephenson. My new digs are a modest 1,200 square feet, but its private and gives me the peace and quiet I need. It's only 2 years old so it was a great deal.

Why did you stay in Troy?

I love my location, its epic. I can be on I-75 in 2 minutes and I can walk to two of my favorite independently owned restaurants, Monjin Lau and Gran Castor! There are so many great places around here and Somerset Mall is 5 minutes away.

And your neighbors?

I haven't really hung out with anyone here (remember I keep musician hours) but my

neighbors are super nice and they all keep an eye out for each other, it's a great community. I also love that they have lawn service so I don't have to hear lawnmowers 24/7! That is the worst thing for night people. Everyone in the burbs do your neighbors a favor and get an electric lawn mower!

I really appreciate my neighbors for being so quiet, it's such a relaxing neighborhood. It's also very well maintained. Of course, I realize my own responsibility to be a good neighbor and I rock the headphones during late nights so I don't blast them out of here. Everyone does their own thing here, it's an interesting community.

Married? Kids?

No spouse, never been married and no kids... thank goodness! My friends all have kids, so I didn't have to. Besides, the band hours make it very difficult to have a family. I don't have any regrets. My sister had two children and that was intense enough for me.

Other than music, which we'll get to later, do you have any hobbies?

I hate sports, it's the nemesis of live music! Bands always get cancelled for playoff games, and people who yell at the TV give me anxiety. My passion is for artists, dancers and musicians.

So I grew up sailing and windsurfing. I just love being by the ocean. When I was younger my family used to vacation on our sailboat. That was our "cottage" my dad would say. We were lucky to fall into a condo in Fort Meyers, Florida, and spend some winters down there. I still go as much as I can. The recent hurricane really took out a lot of cool spots, but it's coming back and is one of my favorite beaches ever. Super laid back and beautiful sunsets and amazing food!

I also like to ski, however, it has been a while. I've been lucky enough to get to Hawaii, Venezuela, and Vail. Those were some epic

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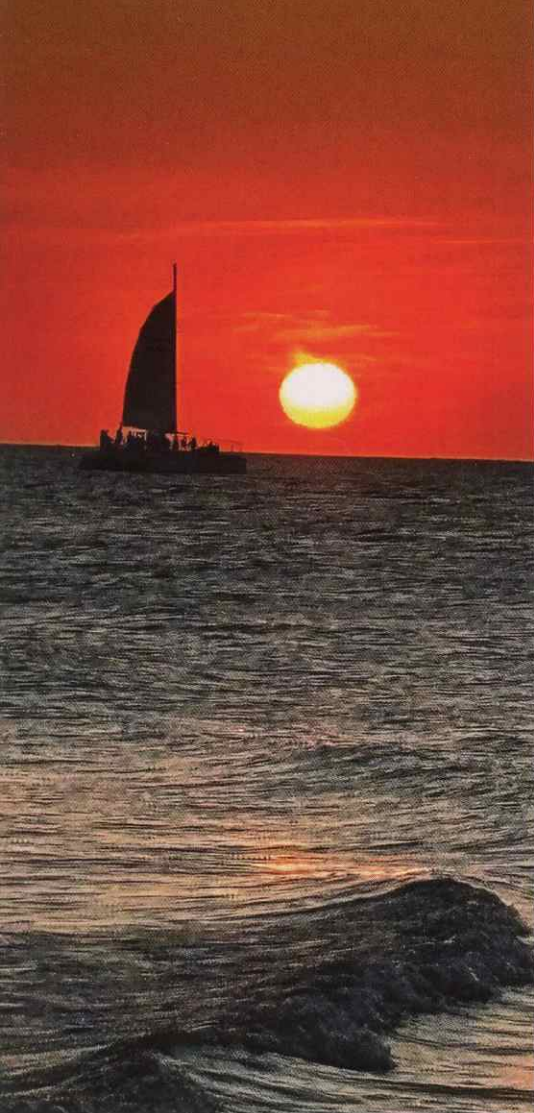
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adventures. But my main hobby is music, it's my job, I love making music with friends.

Any pets?

Yeah, I had a Frenchie called Dobby, aka Dobbs, with an old girlfriend. He was my first fur ball buddy. He was pretty famous around town too back in the day. We lost him a few years ago. Now everyone wants Frenchies but they are crazy expensive. He was a fun little dude. Once tied him to a 35 pound kettle bell and he dragged it 25 feet all the way to the door trying to get out. The little escape artist was always determined to get out the door.

So you turned out to be a musician, does it run in the family?

No, I ended up being the only musician in my family tree. Started playing the piano when I had to quit the trumpet for braces. Ended up being my whole life. High school bands then a career with the Killer Flamingos. I have been able to keep the band going by working with amazingly talented people for 31 years.

It's the most incredible thing to get paid for what you love and enjoy. I implore parents to encourage their children to do what they love. My parents were absolutely awesome

and supportive and my mom was my biggest fan. My parents would always tell me when I left the house...have fun! And I most definitely have and still do!

So tell me more about the Killer Flamingos.

Well, everyone should check us out at killerflamingos.com. It's our hub to let our fans know our schedule and how to connect with us and our music. We play all kinds of gigs like "a corporate event for Allstate Insurance in Chicago, keeping the dance floor hopping at an upscale wedding in Detroit or entertaining throngs of people at an annual festival like Arts, Beats and Eats."

As I've already stated we've been going

for over 30 years. The Killer Flamingos is composed of: Todd Best (lead guitar), Darren Drake (keyboards), David Gondoly (bass), Alyssa Simmons (powerhouse vocalist) and, Jeff Supina (drums). Recently, unexpectedly, we lost drummer and beloved member, Tim Webber in 2023. The band's newest member is the talented drummer Jeff Supina.

So you are the only original member of band?

Yeah, but we've never been better than we are today. We're all multi-talented musicians and vocalists. The Flamingos have a wide range of music to choose from. We're not a weekend bar band, rather a group of seasoned professionals.

