



NEW YORK CITY

THEATRE

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## BYT INTERVIEWS: BUSTER POINDEXTER

Interview conducted by [Kara Weisenstein](#)



BYT Theatre Reporter Kara Weisenstein called up the one, the only, the Basso Profundo Buster Poindexter himself to chat about his upcoming one-night-only show at the Café Carlyle. Buster Poindexter is actually David Johansen, the musician and incredibly singular personality behind such musical revelations as The New York Dolls and the mega hit song “Hot, Hot, Hot.” When his lounge act premiered at the age-old venue, the critics raved and the audience cheered. Here, Kara gets the low-down on David’s life before Buster—including a stint with the legendary Charles Ludlam—and what exactly the audience at the Carlyle should expect on May 9th.

**KARA: Do you mind if I record this?**

DAVID: Just don’t make a record out of it.

**KARA: I promise not to. So tell me how you started out—what did your early career look like?**

D: I was always a singer, since I was 13 or something. I used to sing and dance and stuff, and I’d also sing at the JCC. I moved to the East Village when I was about 18 and I was introduced to Charles Ludlam and the Ridiculous Theatre people. I got really interested in what they were doing—I think they were really genius—and I’d do stuff like lights and sounds... maybe I’d play the guitar. As far as acting, I’d be like... Spear Carrier, or Person In The Crowd. While I was doing that, I got in with the Dolls, and we started playing shows.

**K: What was the most exciting scene about being in New York’s music scene in the 1970s?**

D: The Most exciting THING? It was exciting to put on shows. When we first began, we were like the band of the East Village, so we would have a really diverse kind of artsy clientele. So that was very exciting. We were friends with a lot of interesting people. See, you can’t really say one exciting THING, because the whole thing is just sort of groovy.

**K: So where did Buster Poindexter come in?**



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D: When the Dolls stopped playing, I started a rock'n'roll band called the David Johansen group or something. We made probably five or six records. During that period I was touring incessantly and I started listening to a lot of music that was different from what I was performing and from what I was hearing from other bands. I started listening to a lot of, what I guess you would call jump blues.

I had all these songs in my head, a lot of stuff from Central Avenue and Los Angeles and the 1940s, and I wanted to sing them with a band. So there was this saloon on 15th Street that I used to populate called Tramps. They had a lot of great singers there, and they would sing for a month or so and live upstairs and play on the weekend.

Tramps had other stuff, too, like Ska on Tuesdays, you know, but on Monday, they didn't have any entertainment, so I decided I was gonna do four Mondays in this place, like a little cabaret thing, with just a piano and a bass and a drum. And I was gonna bill it as Buster Poindexter. So we started that on Mondays and it became kind of popular really fast. So we started doing the weekends there, and it developed very organically like that.

**K: What's in the name?**

D: The name was an old kind of alias of mine, but it wasn't a known alias. It comes from being a Poindexter and also being a Buster. You know, smart AND scrappy.

**K: What happened next?**

D: We made a record and it had that song "Hot, Hot, Hot" on it and we became a sort of household name in America. A kind of backroom saloon band turned into a big disco hit. It was kind of unexpected, but it was fun. It's good to have a hit.

**K: And now, the Carlyle. Tell me about that.**

D: At the Carlyle, we have this sort of incarnation of Buster, and a really rocking little band. It's not the same repertoire as we used to do when we first started Buster, it's new. I sing some songs, I tell a few jokes.

**K: How do you think you'll change the atmosphere of the Carlyle? It's an institution for musical theatre performers and cabaret singers from a bygone era.**

D: I'll make it a little more Copa-esque. A swinging sort of Bobby Darin kind of vibe. We played there on Halloween and it was hilarious. The vibe was really good... everyone was yucking it up and really enjoying the music. I really like that room. It's small. It's kind of like when we started out.

**K: Definitely. Anything else we should tell your potential audience members? Anything else they should know about David Johansen?**

D: I'm terribly handsome, and I sing like... like Johnny Hartman. And sort of Basso Profundo.