

New York Dolls

Buster Poindexter Is All Around Us, Always

By Chaz Kangas Tue., Oct. 21 2014 at 3:15 AM

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YouTube Screen Capture

Buster Poindexter is a refined gentleman.

On Tuesday, October 21, at [Café Carlyle](#), the great Buster Poindexter performs. Poindexter is best known for "Hot Hot Hot," the one song that subway-platform steel-drum performers play that isn't outrageously irritating, but -- far from the one-hit wonder he's sometimes chalked up to be -- his impact on pop culture is all around us. While even novice music trivia buffs might have some inkling of his punk-rock past, what may come as news is that Buster Poindexter (or his sometimes credited real name, David Johansen) has touched each of our lives in some capacity or another. Let's take a look at the ubiquity of Buster Poindexter.



Johansen grew up in Staten Island and attended Port Richmond High School, where, as of this year, [he's a Hall of Fame member](#). In the early '70s, Johansen made an important mark on music history with pre-punk/proto-punk/whatever-you-choose-to-call-punkish-music-before-punk group the New York Dolls. From the campy theatrics to the charming energy that made it feel like classic records such as "Personality Crisis" and "Trash" could fall apart at any time, the Dolls blazed the trail in music and influenced everyone from Kiss to the Smiths.

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The Dolls never achieved the chart success and sales to match their critical acclaim and influence, but 15 years later, Johansen scored a legit dance hit with his cover of Arrow's "Hot Hot Hot" under the name Buster Poindexter. Hitting no. 45 on the Billboard Hot 100, the song has become a staple of weddings, sporting events, cruise ships, and karaoke parties. While plenty of silly novelty songs of the '80s have come and gone, Poindexter's "Hot Hot Hot" has remained, er, hot enough after almost three decades to warrant his joining Arcade Fire last August at Barclays for an unexpected cover. (And, yes, we're serious.)

While Johansen was riding the Buster Poindexter wave, he was embarking on a surprisingly prolific film career. He'd acted briefly as a teenager, including a small role in the '60s Sidney Poitier film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, but once the '80s started blending into the '90s, he began to pop up everywhere, throwing it all into his characters with the same energetic glee he gave his punk years. Among his most memorable turns was as Thanatos, the headache-prone villain with a chrome head in the essential 1993 Hulk Hogan/Sherman Hemsley film *Mr. Nanny*.



His name nearly synonymous with New York, it was only a matter of time before Johansen played a cab driver. In the Christmas classic *Scrooged*, he plays the dirty cabbie ghost of Christmas past who has to remind Bill Murray's character what his Christmases were once like. Johansen spoke highly of Murray [during an interview with Johnny Carson](#), referring to him as his acting guru.

But Christmas isn't the only winter holiday benefiting from a Johansen performance in a seasonal classic. The 1994 "Weinerville Chanukah Special" saw him in the role of wise man Gonsah K'nocker, whose musical telling of the story of Chanukah inspires the giant potato pancakes to overthrow their evil alien overlord. Johansen made another Nickelodeon appearance around this time, [playing a park ranger](#) on an episode of "The Adventures of Pete and Pete."

A cool three decades after the first New York Dolls record, and in the midst of the mid-decade Dolls reunions, Johansen was introduced to a new generation as the voice of supervillain Ding Ding Daddy on Cartoon Network's wildly popular "Teen Titans." By breathing some Poindexter life into the hot-rod-racing swingin' villain, it's a presence that's clearly Johansen from the first moment we hear the character gasp. *Buster Poindexter performs at Café Carlyle on Tues., October 21.*