

WASHINGTONIAN

Courthouse Rock

Don't let their day jobs fool you. Once court adjourns, these DC judges know how to party.

By Marisa M. Kashino



The judges of Deaf Dog—such as lead singer William Jackson, center—drop their robes after hours to rock out. Photograph by Dakota Fine.

By day, **William Nooter** is a magistrate judge at the Superior Court of DC. But on a cold Monday night in January, he doesn't look anything like a buttoned-up veteran lawyer. He wears a Hot Tuna T-shirt, which he bought when he saw the band—a spinoff of Jefferson Airplane—in concert. He calls the group “a personal influence.” Nooter has played guitar since he was ten, and now he's one-seventh of Deaf Dog and the Indictments, a rock-'n'-roll group composed almost entirely of DC Superior Court judges.

The other members are judges **Franklin Burgess Jr.**, **John Campbell**, **Russell F. Canan**, **William Jackson**, and **John McCabe** and drummer **Marc Feldman**, the only non-judge of the group. Canan and Feldman, a psychologist, played together in a garage band in 1980.

On this night, Deaf Dog and the Indictments are practicing at Feldman's Chevy Chase DC home for a gig at the 9:30 Club.

Deaf Dog was formed in 2005 for a talent show at a DC Superior Court retreat at Rocky Gap State Park near Cumberland, Maryland. The band's name is a reference to Canan's late German shepherd, Chapin. During a rehearsal at Canan's home, the judge's wife and sons left the room; only the dog stayed. Canan's bandmates quipped that "at least the dog likes us." That's when Canan broke the news that Chapin was deaf.

Since then, the group has developed a following of friends, family, and colleagues. It has mostly played at charity events, including for Children's National Medical Center and Saint Elizabeths Hospital, and for legal organizations, such as the National Juvenile Defender Association.

Campbell says that although lawyers who have seen the band occasionally argue in his courtroom, it's easy to keep his two personas separate: "You're in court wearing robes, being very formal." Campbell plays bass but also has singing experience. In college at Yale, he belonged to the famed a cappella group the Whiffenpoofs.

DC's 9:30 Club is one of the highest-profile venues that Deaf Dog has been invited to play. Canan—who, in addition to playing guitar for the group, helps book its shows—knows the club's lawyer. He also scored Deaf Dog a gig at the Bitter End in Greenwich Village, a New York City landmark that has hosted **Bob Dylan** and **Joni Mitchell**. That club's booking agent is a family friend.

Burgess plays keyboard for the group. Though he has taken classical-piano lessons, most of what he knows about rock 'n' roll, blues, and jazz comes from reading and listening to records.

McCabe is the only member without much prior musical experience. He contributes guitar, vocals, and something beyond musical talent: onstage cartwheels. McCabe explains: "I'm the gymnast of the group."

Finally, Jackson arrives to the band practice, about 20 minutes late. The other guys have been joking that he's let his lead-singer status go to his head.

He was worth waiting for. The band starts its set with the Motown hit "Money (That's What I Want)." Jackson's powerful, bluesy voice fills the living room .

The verdict is in: Deaf Dog and the Indictments can really rock.

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