

# REACTOR

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jazz geniuses -  
My Lucky Blue Suit

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# My Lucky Blue Suit

**j a z z** ( j a z )  
n. a form of  
highly rhythmic,  
syncopated and  
improvised music  
originated in New  
Orleans during the  
late 19th century.  
It has since  
developed various  
styles.



**My Lucky Blue Suit is (left to right) Rick Eaton, Jeff Nelson and Dan Myers**

The most recent development of Jazz music is a group called My Lucky Blue Suit. The trio is the official house band at Wintergrass Gallery in downtown Kennewick. Every Thursday night from 7 until 10, Rick Eaton, Dan Myers and Jeff Nelson set up and perform their blend of jazz and blues in a style that can only be labeled “Freeform Jazz.”

Piano player Rick Eaton usually leads the band. With split voices on his electric keyboard, he lays down funky, walking bass lines with his left hand. With his right, he plays sturdy, bluesy chords and agile melodies. His tone is intelligent and sarcastic, just like his personality. In real life, Rick is a high-end software developer, but his creativity easily spans the gap between the grid of technology and the swirling notes of abstraction. Often performing shoeless, one foot pumps the sustain pedal while the other taps and swivels around in rhythmic convulsion. Between songs, Rick might look up and crack a joke to the audience, but while he plays he retreats into total concentration and he rarely looks up.

Dan Myers, on the other hand, is keen on eye contact. Appearing somewhere between Pan and the Pied Piper, he holds his solid silver flute aloft with pride. In conversation, Dan does not hide his fervor – or better yet, awe – of being alive, its ups and downs. A master of counterpoint, he finds a path between, or floats above, Rick’s scrambling arpeggios. Dan alternates between conventional C-flutes, Native American flutes, or an ancient Japanese Shakahachi, which is more a meditative than musical instrument. One moment his flute will sigh like heartache, and the next it taunt the crowd with inimitable cheer.

On a custom-built drum kit, Jeff Nelson keeps his eye on Rick, reacting, interacting and anticipating the quirky piano player. He’s not flashy or loud, rather, steady and diligent. Most of all, he’s open for anything. Rick might switch from 3:4 time to 5:7 and Jeff will be right there. Here and there he’ll shake things, switching the backbeat to the downbeat, and drives the music in a new direction. For the most part he goes along with Rick’s tempo, but every so often they’ll engage in a subtle tug of war for the tempo.

The final member of the band is not a musician, or even a person. It is the art gallery itself. Wintergrass Gallery, owned by Michael Rastovich, is a wide open loft-style room decked out with modern creations: paintings, sculptures, jewelry, etc. On the second floor of the Old Roxy Theatre, with high ceilings and hardwood flooring, the gallery windows overlook Kennewick Avenue. In the warmer months, Rastovich opens the windows and lets the music spill out onto the street. Only the gallery, says the band, can properly house their sound, and that’s the only place you can go to catch their act. *by Aaron Pogue*

## The Interview

Reactor (R): “My Lucky Blue Suit...” Where did you come up with that?

Rick: Its the punch line to an awful joke.

Dan: It turned out to be a pretty good name.

Rick: Unless they know the joke.

R: So you only play here at Wintergrass?

Rick: Yeah.

Rastovich: No that’s not true. They played at Summer in the Park.

Rick: But really what it is, is us three here. We’re the House Band.

R: So you improvise all the time, do you have anything that you arrange and rehearse?

Dan: Not yet. It’s whatever shows up in the moment, you know, spontaneity is the key.

Jeff: Actually, the only arranging is that we show up at some set time. Usually we start within a couple minutes of that. That’s our best arrangement.

Rick: We really only play every Thursday night.

R: Any interest from record labels?

Rick: Screw ‘em. I don’t think this is something that should be recorded.

## My influence really has been Classical training, but I hope I get over it. That's the truth. It's really a matter of letting go of that. *Dan Myers*

Rastovich: I disagree. And a lot of our guests disagree.

Dan: Yeah, I think we are definitely going to make a quality CD, really. So far Jeff is the one who is actually taking the initiative to bring recording equipment. You know, out of 3 hours playing there's the occasional minute or so that is good.

Rastovich: But we'll edit that out.

Rick: But the whole point of it is to have a live audience and actually interact with them and bring them along on the journey with you, and when it's over, it's over. It's fleeting.

R: How about the gallery? You must consider this venue as almost a member of the band?

Rick: You bet. Absolutely.

Jeff: This is a remarkable place to play. The acoustics in here are just absolutely phenomenal. Between the walls and the woodwork, the floors and the open space, it's really a great place to play. I don't know that it would play the same way in other spots.

Rick: We're very used to the way it sounds in here. It's an instrument just as much as anything else, the environment you play in.

R: Okay, Dan. How do you deal with Rick, who likes to change things up suddenly?

Dan: It's a tremendous learning process for me because I've done music completely by myself my whole life, and it's an ongoing learning experience for me to let go and listen. That's the hardest part for me, is to be quiet, and catch the energy.

R: Jeff, are there any jazz drummers that you're really enamored by?



**In mid-song, flute in hand, Dan Myers seizes the vacant keyboard as Rick Eaton picks up his Rickenbacker bass. Versatility is the key to the improvised style. Dan is also known for picking up a rain stick or beating on congas.**

going. Actually trying to anticipate from what's happening what the next rhythm pattern will be.

Jeff: There's sort of a strange psychic energy that happens. When everybody is directly in the now, and everything else is gone, our music comes out. And when we're not there, when we're not absolutely into that spot of what's happening, then we suck.

R: What prevents that from happening, and what allows that to happen?

Jeff: What prevents that from happening is ego, or some sort of pre-molded notion of where things are going to go. If someone comes in and says this is how I'm going to play this song before they start it, it could be a real train wreck. There could be a conflict.

Dan: But we also don't mind train wrecks.

Rastovich: Part of it, if I may interject, because you guys are free-forming, part of it is groping, you just kind of feel your way around.

Rick: And then you find it and you take off. Try to follow every thought, and don't be afraid to take a wrong turn.

R: Rick, who do you admire?

Rick: Everybody and nobody. I listened to ABBA, John Coltrane and the Beatles today. I mean everything. Country Western music – I listen to that every day. I really do listen to everything. And so I'm unaware of my limitations, although I have lots of them. I don't know what I can't do.

## Science is a way of understanding the music after the fact.

-- Michael Rastovich (on behalf of My Lucky Blue Suit)

Jeff: Louie Bellson, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich. I really like Buddy Rich. He was big, but you know, the band was all about him. In our group, that is the diametrical opposite to what I can be. I have just one aspect of the whole music sound. I don't have to think about melody or harmony. All I have to be is the enforcer to Rick's left hand because the bass is really what drives the music.

R: Do you feel like you're keeping time or catching up?

Jeff: I try to keep up and bring out rhythm patterns that I hear as they are

R: Jeff, you're a rocket scientist. How do mathematics influence your music?

Jeff: Well there's definitely symmetry and structure to music. Without some basis of structure, music won't be pleasing to the ear.

Rastovich: Science is a way of understanding the music after the fact.

Rick: Pretend one of us said that.