

Detroit Music Oral History Project

Detroit Michigan

## **Donald (Don) Duprie**

Interviewed by

Samuel Schmaltz

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Detroit, MI

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Information Sciences

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

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### Biography:

Don Duprie is a musician and a firefighter who has lived all his life in the River Rouge area. He developed an interest in music at a young age and eventually started playing his own music, though he enjoys music most through the act of song writing. Don has worked with many musicians in Detroit and has written many songs focusing on issues that he has observed in the working class community of Detroit.

### Interviewer:

Samuel Schmaltz is currently a graduate student at Wayne State University, working for a Masters in Information Science with a focus on Archives and Digital Content Management.

### Abstract:

Don starts by discussing his childhood and getting into music through his church. He discusses how he came to want to be a firefighter as well. Major topics of his writing career include struggling with money, working with other Detroit musicians, his preference with recording albums to live venues, stories regarding his fans and critics, balancing firefighting and songwriting, the current state of Detroit, and it's future. Duprie reveals himself to being somewhat introverted in nature, and to being someone who has learned to take the punches life has given him without getting overly upset. Duprie also believes that music is a way of making a statement, and that if you're going to write something that it should be meaningful.

### Restrictions:

None.

Original Format:

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Walter P. Reuther Library

Wayne State University

Detroit, MI

Transcript of interview conducted on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018 with:

Don Duprie in Detroit, MI

By: Samuel Schmaltz

Transcription:

Schmaltz: This is Sam Schmaltz. We are here at the Kresge Library at Wayne State University. It is November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018, and I am here with Don Duprie to contribute to the Detroit Musicians Collections at the Reuther Library. Thank you for joining me today, Don.

Duprie: Thanks for having me, Sam.

Schmaltz: Alright, so when and where were you born?

Duprie: I was born in Lincoln Park Michigan in Outer Drive Hospital 1976 February 14<sup>th</sup>.

Schmaltz: Alright, can you tell me about your family

Duprie: Yep. I have a mother a father and a sister. I have a twin sister. My mother and father are both River Rouge people. That's where I live now: born and raised in River Rouge. My father was a city worker and my mother was a... she sold Avon(?) and was a city worker as well. They both had about 3 to 4 jobs, it didn't matter...just depends on what time of the year it was. My sister is a schoolteacher now...but we grew up in River Rouge.

Schmaltz: And where did you go to school?

Duprie: River Rouge High School.

Schmaltz: Any stories you would like to share from your childhood?

Duprie: Um...you know, it was a good childhood. I wasn't too upset about anything. We always food and stuff, you know. We're just a regular working class family, man. Nothing crazy stood out (laughs).

Schmaltz: That's fine. So what first got you interested in music? Was it a band or a musician...?

Duprie: When I was really little my mother and grandmother used to take me and my sister to this little church. Right behind the steel mill on Orchard Street, it's called the River Rouge. It was a southern Christian church and the preacher would play guitar up there. He would sing and play guitar. I just started liking it.

would play guitar up there. He would sing and play guitar. I just started liking it, you know? I remember my grandma's friend bought me a little toy guitar when I was a little boy. I always liked that and I always wanted to do that, but I never did anything with the guitar until I was a little older. I would jump around and pretend I was playing the guitar, and that's what got me first into it, you know?

Schmaltz: When did you actually learn to play the guitar and harmonica?

Duprie: When I was about 12 or 13 my father liked to gamble quite a bit on the weekends. He would get into these card games after work. One Saturday morning he came and woke me up, he probably thought I hadn't gone to bed yet because it was early(?). At about 6 or 7 he said, "Do you still want a guitar?" He got me out of bed and said, "come on man, get your stuff together." So we waited...and he took me to a place called Scandlin' Music(?) in Taylor...I think it was in Taylor. He took his money he won playing cards and bought me a guitar, and I just started learning how to play it. I took one lesson and I didn't like it, so I kind of taught me after that. That's how I started, you know?

Schmaltz: Did you find it difficult?

Duprie: Yeah, I'm not the greatest guitar player on the planet. I'm just more of a banger. I do good enough to get by. Also, my mother bought me a harmonica...I guess I forgot about that part...when I was really young, probably about 12 and I never messed with it ever. She bought me a harmonica and a harmonica holder, which is still the Harmonica Holder I use. That was one thing...whenever I put it on I could do it. I don't know...I could just do it. I could play the harmonica and play the guitar at the same time. The guitar was...here's the thing: I don't think anything is difficult if you don't want to be lazy. If you want to work at something than it's not going to be difficult...but that's one of those things, the guitar. You have to work at it, you know. I could be a great guitar player if I wanted to but I'm more of a writer. I don't focus that much time into...you know what I mean, getting that great at the guitar? (Laughs)

Schmaltz: Can't spread yourself too thin?

Duprie: Yeah, and I'm kind of lazy sometimes, man. I don't want to sound lazy but I just...I don't know, I'm not super passionate about that part of it. I like guitars, you know? I buy a lot of guitars and stuff like that but...yeah.

Schmaltz: So what's the first song you wrote?

4:54 Duprie: Oh man, I remember I wrote this song for this girl I liked. I think I was about 19 or something. I had the guitar sitting there and I just started writing. I couldn't tell you what it was but I remember thinking she would love it. I don't even think she liked it. I played it for her and I thought it would win her over, but you know what it's like: if they don't like you they don't like you, brother.

Schmaltz: (Laughs) So after you graduated high school you went into construction?

Duprie: Yes sir

Schmaltz: How was that for you?

Duprie: It was great, you know? I wasn't...I knew I wasn't going to college; it just wasn't my thing. I never excelled in school at all. I liked it, I went to school all the time and I never missed school, but I knew that college wasn't for me. I

started in construction and I liked it. It was good money at the time, being 18 years old. Back then it was 1995 and I started working with the pile drivers in the carpenters union and I was making 21 dollars an hour, and that was way back then. It was a lot of money for a young guy. So it was great...it was dangerous but it was great.

Schmalatz: What made you switch over to becoming a firefighter?

Duprie: Well I always wanted to be a fire fighter. Even before I got out of high school I took the test to be a fireman. I passed and did real good but they wouldn't hire me because I was 18 and they wanted guys that were over 21. What I would do is when I got laid off from construction I would just go back and put myself through college with the money I was making. I would go and take classes down at the community and things like that, or put myself through the fire academy, emt school. I knew I always wanted to be one, it was just a matter of time.

Schmalatz: Even back when you were a younger kid?

Duprie: Yeah. I remember being little because my mother...2 of her friend's husbands were firemen. I thought they were cool, you know? So that's what I wanted to be.

Schmalatz: Any interesting stories from fire fighting?

Duprie: Yeah man, how many hours you got? I could tell you all kinds of stuff, bro. Down where I'm at in River Rouge is a low-income neighborhood so you would see a lot of stuff. I was a paramedic for a long time but now we just do straight fire fighting. I rode the ambulance for 13 years. It's a low-income neighborhood, so you see a lot of messed up stuff. It's a weird job, you know? You see things that people shouldn't be seeing on a regular basis for a long time, so it starts to get to you after awhile I guess. I love the job though, I'm not knocking it.

Schmalatz: After a while you got laid off temporarily...

Duprie: yes

Schmalatz: From that job. Did you immediately know you wanted to try going to music at that point or is it something that built up more slowly than that?

Duprie: You know had happened was that I was at this point in the music business where I had already had a publishing deal and had done all of these things...you see back then everyone would tell you, "If you don't do music straight up then this isn't for you". I was so burnt out from the fire department, I felt fortunate to get laid off. I was like, "I'm going to go into music full time. I'm going to go out and start touring and doing all of these things." What I realized was that wasn't for me, that wasn't in my blood. There's a special kind of focus it takes to get out there and do that every night. I never really enjoyed playing even when I was a young guy being in bands, but it was a necessary evil for me. So when I kind of got what I was looking for...you know how they tell you to be careful what you wish for? That was kind of it. It wasn't really for me, but I did learn that you can write for other people and you can do all these other things. I kind of learned to start doing it for the love of it, to leave a legacy of what you've done instead of trying to be this thing or trying to be what you think other people think that you're supposed to be. It's not about that: it's about the craft and getting stuff done.

Schmaltz: You ever have difficulties managing that aspect of your life and the firefighting?

Duprie: The music part?

Schmaltz: Yeah.

Duprie: Yeah, especially now. I have to cancel a lot of things like how the other day I had to cancel with you. Before it was different because we didn't work as much, I had a lot of time off so it was kind of the ideal job for doing music. Now it's not because I'm working so much. There were times where it got a little difficult. You know, you want to go do this thing but you couldn't because you had to be at work. We work 24-hour days so you're always there.

**10:08** Schmaltz: What is your inspiration for songwriting?

Duprie: Life, man: everyday life. Not my life...I kind of look at it like I'm trying to do it for others. In my opinion, writing is...I write for the people, you know? I always try to tell people, you look at writing a song like a pizza: you gotta make sure everybody gets a slice. Make sure you get a slice too, right? You have to make sure everyone else gets a piece. You have to think about how music and songs have helped people over the years, and helped me. You want to be able to get that to others, let them know that you feel what they're going through and let them know you're telling their story; that somebody cares about them. That's what I try to do to the best of my ability.

Schmaltz: Have you ever had any instances where you've had writers block?

Duprie: Yeah, I'm kind of going through writers block right now. I wouldn't say writers block, I think it...it's always there in front of you. I do get it sometimes but what I've learned over the years is that if you do get it what you have to do if you get caught in a spot...just keep telling the truth. See where it's going and look and say, "where's this story going? What happened in this story, in your head?" You know in real life what happens, and that is the way you can push through that: just tell the truth. Don't try to make anything up, because usually the truth is better than anything else.

Schmaltz: So out of all of the songs you've written do you have one that resonates with you particularly strongly?

Duprie: (thinks a while) I got this song cut by this national artist: Whitey Morgan and the 78s. The song is called "What am I supposed to do" and it's pretty special to me just because...to see where it went and where it's at now...it just makes me feel good that I was able to get that song out to the world. That's a pretty special song to me.

**12:28** Schmaltz: So in terms of performances, do you prefer just to make albums in a studio or do you prefer to do things live?

Duprie: I don't prefer to do things live. Like I said: it's a necessary evil, playing out. Sometimes it's okay but it's just seems like it's such a...I was just never much into it. I used to love going to the studio. I used to record everything down here by Jim Diamond's place and get a recorder, but they've torn that down now and pushed him out because of how they're bringing everybody in here. They tripled his rent and kicked him out, you know? They then tore the studio down. That's the weird thing: going to a studio where you feel comfortable...I don't find places like that anymore. I smoke cigarettes and stuff and at Jim's place you

and places like that anymore. I smoke cigarettes and stuff and at Jim's place you could do that. I can't do anything like that now. I have a home studio that I do some stuff at. I have little places here and there. If I had to choose I would rather be recording than playing live.

Schmaltz: Where did your nickname "Doop" come from? Was that a music thing or has that been around for longer?

Duprie: That's been since I've been a little kid, man, because of my last name. Everyone would just call me Doop. I'm sure they called my dad that, too. You know how that works, right?

Schmaltz: Yeah. As for other musicians you've worked with in the "Inside Outlaws"...what could you tell me about them?

Duprie: That's our writing collective. First I named my band that because I made it an EP long ago, and I played all the instruments on it. I just made the name up as a band name just to put it out there. I thought it was kind of funny. It ended up becoming this writing collective, working with all of these different writers and musicians. I really think they're a great group of people. I work with Alice and Louis, "inaudible", Ty Stone, Johnny Freeman...a lot of these people whose company I enjoy. Musician wise I have Pete Ballard in my band and Greg Beyer, Danny Kanka. You couldn't ask for better guys than those people, they're just great people. That's one thing that I feel fortunate for: I feel like I'm surrounded by good people all the time. It's hard to find that in this business.

Schmaltz: If you wanted to leave one idea or feeling to people walking away from hearing one of those songs, what do you think it would be?

**15:06** Duprie: Just try and do the right thing in life. Do good. Not evil.

Schmaltz: What do you think makes Detroit a hotspot for musical talent.

Duprie: I think it has something to do with the...Down by me, I can just speak for where I live down there...um...I think what happens is just that it's something you hear all day long. All I hear is trains clanging, boat horns and trucks driving, you know what I mean? It's like a beat in your head. I just take the stories that are all inside of that. That's just done by me, I can't speak for anybody else because I've only been in that one area my whole life. I think it is something that you hear all the time, and it just gets implanted in your head. I think that's where that sound comes from, that grittiness. Then you have a lot of real life stuff going on here. It's nothing to be taken lightly I guess.

Schmaltz: Have you worked with other noteworthy Detroit musicians?

Duprie: Yeah, I've been pretty fortunate to do some pretty neat stuff with Don Was. He's a great, great person. I think he does so much for this city. He's the sweetest man you'll ever meet. That would be the most noteworthy one I guess. I've written some songs that people have recorded: Uncle Kracker recorded one of my songs...and you know, a few other people, but I would say that Don Was... he's probably the most noteworthy guy and he was great. I did a few types of covers (?) with him and I couldn't say enough good stuff about him.

Schmaltz: So how long do you think you'll keep playing? From the sounds of things, firefighting is more your major focus. Music is a little bit more of a...

Duprie: I'll tell you this: I think that I was born to be a songwriter. Firefighting is just a means to an end. What I do is that I just go where life takes me. Wherever

life takes me, I'm going to be there. I think songwriting...I'll do that until the day I die, you know? That's my thing...any firefighting or any other job I do just because I'm there, and I think that I'm supposed to be there. That's how you get these songs and that's how you...I guess if I was working at an ice cream parlor there wouldn't be the same kind of songs, so I look at all of that stuff as a means to an end.

Schmaltz: So if you had to give advice to people who wanted to song write themselves, what do you think it would be?

**18:15** Duprie: I would say that if you want to do it very seriously...I always tell people this: there's a lot of people who say that they life to do something, they'll say, "I live to do this." I think if you want to do something seriously artistic you have to be dying for it. You really have to put your life into it and almost let it kill you...and finish things. I tell people all of the time: finish things. A lot of people out there doing stuff and not a lot of people out there getting stuff done...that's in life. Finish what you started, because I have come across so many people who have things half done all the time...just a little bit of that done. I think that if you want to be serious and you want to be a good songwriter: finish things. It's not that hard. Even if it's not that great, finish it. You can always go back.

Schmaltz: On that subject: have there ever been any ideas for a song which never quite made it into an actually fully fledged piece.

Duprie: Yeah, there have. What's funny is that is that I still look at those songs and go: well, maybe they might come up again. I keep everything documented pretty well. There's stuff that I've been working on for years that's still not done and that I'll work on every now and then. It's just not time sometimes for that stuff to come out and be done. It's all about timing I guess.

Schmaltz: On the topic of time: do you find that things that things that you can sing about change as time passes and the socio-political climate changes? Does that present new opportunities?

Duprie: Yeah, I think that whatever is going on in the world at the moment you can...you good there?

Schmaltz: Umm...Not quite (speaking to myself)

Duprie: Is everything okay?

Schmaltz: Oh, everything's okay.

Duprie: Okay. Well, I'll tell you about what has happened recently. With Trump becoming president: I felt like, "Man, all of these songs that I've written over the years..." it's like people didn't like the workingman anymore. Trump was sticking up for the workingman and it kind of made me sad. I hope people still like my stuff, the stuff I wrote before. They do, but the world is changing, we're in a totally different place now. It get's kind of weird, but you can always find something to write about. All I do is report, bro. I don't try to get in and put in my two cents in about anything. I just tell it like it is, right down the middle of the road. You have a window with witch you can say anything about yourself. You just report; that's what I feel like my job is, to report on what's happening. There is always something out there to report on.

**21:12** Schmaltz: If there was anywhere else you could work other than where you are now, where do you think it would be? Is it just that you're so comfortable

are now, where do you think it would be? Is it just that you're so comfortable with where you are now that you wouldn't even want to consider (it)?

Duprie: I'd consider anything...but I don't know. I guess I've never thought of that. I do like where I'm at now and I'm comfortable where I'm at, but I've found that whenever you get too comfortable something comes along to shake that up, you know? We'll see what happens. I'm like Forest Gump, man: I'm just going through life.

Schmaltz: Keep running.

Duprie: That's right! "Keep running Forest!"

Schmaltz: So if something happened and for whatever reason you can't keep going as firefighter, what do you think you would do then?

Duprie: Hopefully be a writer, you know? That's the plan. What I'm trying to do is trying to get enough years in the fire department so I can retire from the fire department so I do have a little bit of a pension there, so then I could just do the writing without having to worry about working and waking up every morning. I'm getting old, man. I'm 42 and I've been working ever since I was 12 years old. I'm getting a little tired of it I guess.

Schmaltz: I can imagine. Do you have any particular performances or sessions... anything like that...that have made a significant impact?

Duprie: Yeah, I can tell you some stuff that...just recently I got to go out and... like I said, Whitey Morgan and the 78's...they're a national act and they recorded my song. They were playing at Fillmore and they were sold out and they asked me, "would you like to come up and sing this song?" So I go to Fillmore, go out on that stage, and everyone knew me and it made me feel good to walk out there and have everyone call my name. I'm like, "that's great!" Everyone knew the song, so that made me feel good. Session wise I would say anything I've done with Jim Diamond. I just loved going over there and being with him. He's such a good guy, so funny. That place was very special I think the last record we made over there was called, "The Corridor," and I think that stands out the most in terms of work. I liked that record quite a bit.

Schmaltz: How did it feel when that started happening, when you would run into people and people would know you and your work?

**23:52** Duprie: It's weird. It makes you feel weird. It's strange, because what's happening is that you're touching people on an overwhelming level and you don't want to feel that way. Me personally, I don't like to feel that way. I just feel like I'm doing what I'm doing. It makes me a little uncomfortable. I've been in situations where...just as an example; I was at a show one time playing at St. Andrew's Hall. I try to say in the back in the dressing room, but I had to come out to do something, and it was packed in there. Here's my brother (likely a figurative one), he's a Detroit cop and he's standing in the Detroit vestibule area but with all of his cop friends. He sees me and he says, "Come'ere man!" So I'm getting ready to go to where he's at, and this drunk guy stops me. He's almost in tears. He told me, "Let me tell you something man: I almost killed myself, but I got your record and I didn't." His girlfriend is there saying, "yeah, he was going to kill himself! He got your record and now he wants to live!" Then my brother comes over there and he says, "come on man, you have to take a picture with me and my friends right now! Right now!" I'm like, "if you don't hold on, this guy is going to kill himself. Just wait a second." "Oh come on man, I don't have time



for this shit!” I’m like, “listen dude...” that’s the kind of stuff where you go, “this is weird.” You know what I’m saying? You’re like, “this is a strange situation to be in.” That’s the kind of stuff that happens where you get like, “whoa, this sucks.” It’s great too, you know? It’s great to know that people know your stuff...but I always think you want the wrong people to like your stuff. I always get the need to feel like I’m smart or something, because I never went to school. I want the educated people, the people in academia to like me...but then you take it for granted that Rick and Dave working at Ford’s are your biggest fans. It’s kind of a weird thing...I guess...if that makes any sense.

Schmaltz: Yeah, it makes sense. I can imagine that must have been quite a weird experience.

**25:52** Duprie: Yeah, you have stuff like that happen all of the time. I think what happens is that people get these records and they listen to them and they feel like they know you. I understand that, because it’s almost like you’re talking to them through these records and they think you’re this person who’s helped them. They want to be like, “hey, thank you”...or whatever. That’s kind of what happens. That’s what I think. Like I said, I’m not knocking it, it’s great, but it makes you feel a little weird. It makes you feel good too.

Schmaltz: Do you have any projects coming up? Any records you’re going to be making?

Duprie: I’m working on a new record on and off right now. I’m at a place that...I don’t know man; I’m at a weird crossroads. I am working on a new record here and there. I have 2 records already written and ready to go up, getting ready to get recorded...It always feels like I have this one record I wanted to record for forever and I get ready to do it and a whole bunch of other songs will come up and that record keeps getting pushed back. This new record is pretty good. It has a few songs I like a lot. We’ll see what happens.

Schmaltz: Does it have a name?

Duprie: I don’t know man. I was going to call it “Sirens, heartaches and trains.” That’s the title of one of the songs. I think that’s what’s going to end up happening. I’m really excited about the songs on this one. I feel like there’s a lot of good tunes, and no soft spots. I try not to put out any filler on any these records, and that’s why I only put out a record every 5 years. I’m not in a position where I have to put out a record every year to keep touring. I just wait, take my time and put out a set of 10 songs that are the best I can do.

Schmaltz: If you’re going to say something, it has to be something important?

Duprie: Yeah. I don’t want to write just for writing’s sake or make up songs just to do it. I feel like I have a responsibility to that guy that came up and said that, or to Dave and Chuck who work at the plant. You have a responsibility to these people to keep putting out music that’s for everybody, that’s going to help. I think if you don’t do it...If you know it but you don’t, that’s shame on you.

Schmaltz: How do you feel when you listen back on your own work?

Duprie: You know, I listen to my own stuff a lot. Some of it I love..the majority of it. Some of you’re like, “I wish I could have done a little better.” What happens is that those are just moments in time and you just have to (inaudible). One thing that I deal with a lot is that I never had money to make...the first record I had money to make because a publishing company put in the money to

record that money to make because a publishing company put up the money to do it. That was my first record about myself. I didn't really know what I was doing, but I like it. Then you'll get into some of these situations like with "The Corridor." I didn't have any money, man. You have to do a lot of stuff on your own. Some of the stuff you get, you're like, "I wish that could have been better." You have to realize that you didn't have any money or anybody helping you on this stuff. You have to take that all into consideration I guess. Overall there's only a little bit where you're like, "Oh man." Good question.

**29:37** Schmaltz: Was it hard to keep going at those times, to keep pursuing this when...

Duprie: There are a lot of times, man. When you don't have any money...it's rough, dude. What's great is that I have good family and friends. I'll probably never go hungry, but it does get hard. People always tell you, "money isn't everything", but I'll tell you what: it helps. I'll tell you what though, being broke does something to you. It gives you the eye of the tiger, where you are in there a little fiercer, but it's not as comfortable. Like I said, wherever you're at in life, you get put there for a certain reason. Maybe that's why I like that record so much: that was the lowest point of my life. I had no money or anything. I was just working at scraping by. You go from having this great job and being respected to being nothing. It's almost like...not to be weird, but it's like Superman losing his powers. "Man, I can't even beat anybody up." You feel weird after you lose that great job as a fireman and now you're working in kitchens and stuff because you don't have any education. Like I said, I think that helps with the creative process.

Schmaltz: Your friends and family were always supportive of you taking... because obviously going into songwriting seriously is a bit of a risk...but despite that, were they always supportive?

Duprie: Yep. Like I said, I never did it where I quit a great job and just went, "this is going to be my life." They were always understanding. Whenever I was down in the dumps or needed dough they would always help out, loan me money, this and that. I have a good support team around me. They are very supportive people for sure.

Schmaltz: That's always important.

Duprie: It's very important. A lot of people don't have that I'm fortunate to have that. I'm very fortunate to have that.

Schmaltz: That aside; looking back what are some things you feel you could have done differently?

Duprie: I guess...you know that saying, "if it was a fifth, we'd all be drunk?"

Schmaltz: I don't think so, actually.

**32:02** Duprie: I look back and wish...I had gotten a Kresge Grant back in the day and I wish I used the money a little differently. I used it to start a business that didn't work out. I think about that a lot. That's kind of one of those things that I wish I could go back and do a little different, but...that's how it goes, man. I think I probably got some of the best songs from that time. I wish I'd done that a little differently, man. I don't really regret anything, but I wish I had used that money a little more wisely.

Schmaltz: Did the song...I want to make sure I say this right..."More dollars than sense"...was that partially inspired by that?

Duprie: Oh, yeah. That's my life man. At that time...you know what's funny about that song is that NBC was going to do a series about songwriters; they came to my house and filmed all of the stuff, and that was a song they wanted to use for the show. It never worked. I was really excited about that (laughs) it never went down. That was inspired by the way I was living at the time. That was smack dab in the middle of that time too. I was working at The Comet Bar when I wrote that song. That isn't even here anymore. It was off of Cass and Henry (?). That was just my life and the life of everyone else around me, you know?

Schmaltz: In terms of the city...obviously it's been struggling a bit, but are you optimistic about the future?

Duprie: Around here?

Schmaltz: Yeah.

Duprie: I don't know. I think we're...if you look back on the problems we've had 10 or 15 years ago with the housing markets and stuff...do you see a little bit of a correlation with that now? I mean, we're building this whole city on a guy that's basically a loan shark. That whole housing thing, paying all this money for homes and stuff...that kind of killed us didn't it? About 10 or 15 years ago?

That's part of the whole crisis, man. I think that might happen again. I would love for things to go great down here. I hate to see people getting pushed out of the place that they've lived in forever. People can just...it's unbelievable...they can just come in one fell swoop and do whatever they want. I think they're going to have to reap what they sow eventually. That's the way I look at it...I'm not the happiest thinking or talking guy, you know what I mean.

Schmaltz: I tend to veer on the pessimist end of the scale, myself.(Duprie likely thought I said optimist here).

Duprie: I try to do that in my life...you know, around me. I try to make where I'm at a better place. I try to bring people to where I'm at, correctly. I think down here that...I just hate to see people with money doing whatever they want. It's not fair to a lot of people. I hear people say, "you have to break a few eggs to make an omelet." What if I break your fucking head open when you say that to me again? I just feel like we treat people like garbage and through them out.

That's not right and I hate to see that happen. Whatever happens, happens down here. I'm not too concerned with it. I'm over there in Rouge...it's like New Jersey down there. We just stay down there and do are thing. I wish everybody well down here, but whatever happens, happens.

Schmaltz: So have you toured around at all?

Duprie: Yes.

Schmaltz: Do you have a favorite place you tour to?

Duprie: Huh...Favorite place to tour to? For a very short time I used to play in a place called Savannah, Georgia. Every time I go back there I just love it so much. It's my favorite place on the planet. I don't know if you've ever been there, but it's a great town. If you ever get a chance you should go check it out. It's really, really nice. It's by the coast and stuff. It's a great place. I do like going back there and playing and things like that. When I get out there...oh, and Lafayette

Louisiana is great also. Best people on the planet, salt of the earth.

Schmaltz: You fairly well known down there?

Duprie: In Lafayette? Yes, actually. It's kind of weird: that's the first time I remember being in a bar before a show. I was getting a drink at the end of the bar and I hear people going, "hey, that's him right there." I was like, "oh, that's cool." Yeah, that's pretty neat. Nobody told me they wanted to kill themselves...it was great.

Schmaltz: umm...What's the most frustrating experience you think you've had as a songwriter?

**37:25** Duprie: I'll tell you this man: what I had to stop doing was getting my hopes up for stuff. I'm going to tell you right now; in the entertainment industry there are a lot of disappointments. If you get your hopes up for anything, it hurts you. I've been in a lot of different situations where I say, "Finally, this is going to happen", and then it doesn't. I was just telling you about that T.V show on NBC. If NBC comes to your house for 2 days and spend all this money and have a big truck and film crew...I was like, "Wow, I'm going to be on T.V!"...and then it doesn't happen and you're like, "man, this sucks." It makes you depressed, so what you have to start doing is take it all with a grain of salt. Any time anyone goes, "hey man, this and that and the other!" "Oh, cool. I'll do it." If something happens, it happens. If it doesn't, it doesn't. I had to quit getting my hopes up over stuff, because you will run into a lot of things. You can work as hard as you want, but if it's not meant to be, it's not meant to be, you know?

Schmaltz: It still invites room for serendipity.

Duprie: Yeah, sure. It's funny that you say that. That's true. It can be disappointing at times, but that's what makes the good things that happen so special. Sometimes they're few and far between. Like I said, I'm at a point where I stopped worrying about any of that. I just want to leave a good legacy, man. I know that, I got that right now. I could die today and be happy with that, with what I've left behind...but I'm going to keep going until I can't breath anymore. Keep doing it.

Schmaltz: Do you know if you have any tours coming up?

**39:27** Duprie: I don't have anything right now. Hopefully when work settles down I'll be able to book some stuff. I know my band wants to get out there a lot. They're always bugging me about that kind of stuff. I like to tour by myself a lot though. It's just a lot easier than touring with 3 or 4 other dudes. As much as I love them, it's still 4 other grown men with you all of the time and you have to deal with all these personalities and stuff like that. I'd like to go by myself and do the writing thing. It's simpler and cheaper.

Schmaltz: The friction between all of these personalities, did that ever cause any issues?

Duprie: Yeah, man. One of my best friends on the planet, Pete Ballard, who has been with me forever...he's a pedal steel player...me and him, there was a time where we didn't even talk for a while because we just kind of...he didn't like something I was doing and I didn't like that he didn't like that, so we didn't talk. He's one of my best friends on the planet...you get into these problems or someone gets a little drunk and tears something up on a show or something...  
What I have to remember is that these are just people like me. I try not to judge

what I have to remember is that these are just people like me. I try not to judge them. I'm not judging you, I'm not even a lawyer, bro. You know? It can cause friction sometimes, but at the end of the day it all ends up working out. As long as nobody dies or anything, you're good.

Schmaltz: Pete was his name?

Duprie: Yes. Pete Ballard.

Schmaltz: Did you meet him through your music?

Duprie: I was doing the first record and he came in and played some stuff and we've been going ever since. Great guy, great person. Great sense of humor, too. Good man.

Schmaltz: You might meet outside of purely professional...?

Duprie: Oh, yeah. We hang out and do stuff.

Schmaltz: That's nice.

Duprie: Yeah, he's a sweet guy. I'll be talking on the phone almost every day and he's one of the few people I talk to a lot.

Schmaltz: You don't always get to choose to who you work with, so it's nice when it ends up being someone you click with.

Duprie: Yeah. They're great musicians too, so...they all have great heads of hair, which I don't. (laughs). They're good cats.

Schmaltz: (temporary silence) What are the rest of your family doing now, out of curiosity?

Duprie: My dad's retired, my mother...she kinda...I don't think you can retire from selling Avon, but she did it for 35 years I think. She doesn't do that anymore. They moved to Monroe. My sister is a schoolteacher. They (his parents) help with her kids and stuff. They live out that way, and they're just doing their thing...nothing crazy.

Schmaltz: How long do you get along with your sister? I have a sister of my own and...you know...we generally get along well but sometimes they seem like...uh...you grate each other sometimes.

Duprie: I have a twin sister so, I think...I love her. She's the funniest person I know. She's so funny and we just laugh all the time, tell jokes. She has a good sense of humor so we can play off of each other. I really enjoy her company. She's a funny person.

Schmaltz: If you have a live performance, do they ever come to see them?

Duprie: Sometimes. When I play bigger venues like opening for someone in Fillmore or St. Andrews they will come out sometimes. My sister will come to the smaller bars and stuff like that. It depends on what I'm doing.

44:22 Schmaltz: So when you retire, you're just going to focus all of your focus onto songwriting, right?

Duprie: Yeah, I'm hopeful. If I can retire. We'll see what happens there. One thing about that job is you never know what's going to happen. So yeah, that's what I'm going to try to do. Who knows, if I'm on the road something might pop up...but that's my plan.

Schmaltz: If that opportunity does present itself and you get that extra time, what do you imagine you would do with it? Is there something you would do to give yourself more ideas or expand on existing ideas?

Duprie: I don't know, I never thought about it. Maybe I would tour a little more. Maybe I would feel more comfortable touring if that was my only job. I would also...I like to help people as well. I might volunteer or something like that. I like to cook; I always kind of enjoyed cooking for the less fortunate and things like that. Who knows what's going to pop up? We'll see. I know that you have to do something when you don't have a job anymore and your just getting paid. I've seen a lot of guys who have gotten there and have turned to drinking or something like that. You've got to watch out: a lot of time on your hands is the devil's workshop, brother.

Schmaltz: You have to keep yourself busy.

Duprie: That's right.

**46:04** Schmaltz: If there's any other stories you'd like to share...

Duprie: Not really, bro. I think I might of said it all for you.

Schmaltz: (Long pause) I'm sorry, I'm just...

Duprie: No, you're all right. You did a great job. These are great questions, man, better than the best interviewers I've ever sat with.

Schmaltz: So you've done other interviews about your music before?

Duprie: Yes. I've been interviewed by Dave Marsh. He wrote for The Rolling Stones and founded Creem Magazine. I got to be interviewed by him one time and it was great. I've had some pretty good interviews over the years.

Schmaltz: That's nice.

Duprie: These are really good. You're doing a great job.

Schmaltz: I certainly try.

Duprie: (Laughs) that's all you can do.

Schmaltz: If some miracle happened and you suddenly got a bunch of free time on your hands and someone told you, "why don't you take a few days to go on a vacation," what would you do about that?

**47:51** Duprie: I don't know, man. I've only taken one vacation my whole life and it was when I was 22. I went to Mexico with some guys from the fire department for 4 days or so. That's it. I've never really had a vacation. My sister always jokes with me. "You haven't ever been on vacation, have you?" I would say, "I've had that one." That's just how I am. When we were alone we never went on vacations or things like that because my parents were always working. We did

on vacations or things like that because my parents were always working. We did do things, but we weren't one of those families that had to do a vacation all the time. I'm not that person either. I would just feel like I'm not being productive if I went on a vacation, you know? I feel like every minute counts. Is that weird?

Schmaltz: No, it's not weird. That does make me think of something that I should have probably asked earlier though.

Duprie: Go ahead.

Schmaltz: Growing up, your parents were all doing a bunch of different jobs. Do you think that led you to independent quicker?

Duprie: Yeah. I wanted to get the hell out of there too, you know? My mother could be a bit overbearing, so you want to get away from that right away. I moved out pretty quick...not that I had problems with it or anything, I just wanted to be out of there. That does end up making you more independent, but you always end up depending on them for certain things. My dad is a mechanic...he worked on housing for the city, so when I had problems with the furnace or a car you would always call him. "What's up, man?" "What should I do here?" You always end up depending on them, but you do get away and get more independent I guess...at a young age.

Schmaltz: That had its advantages I imagine.

Duprie: Yeah, it does. I think that people are at where they're supposed to be. I had friends who stayed with their parents' house for a long time. They like to help their families out and that's just how they work. Me personally, I like to be alone a lot. That's just how I am. I'm kind of a loner type dude. I have friends but I'm not always...I'm not one of those people who has to be around their friends all of the time, you know what I mean?

Schmaltz: So you're introverted?

Duprie: Yeah. My dad was always like that. He was by himself a lot, working on cars and stuff. I like to be alone (?). I do like to have people over to the house and do things like that, but I have no problem being alone either.

Schmaltz: I imagine that's a big part of why you'd prefer to record a label rather than do live venues.

Duprie: Right, that's very true. Being around people is a little weird to me, especially as I'm getting older. I don't know why (laughs). I very rarely go to the bars anymore or anything like that. I just feel strange.

Schmaltz: Speaking of dealing with situations like that, did you ever have to deal with stage fright, or was it never quite an issue?

Duprie: I think that's what they make booze for. After a while you don't think about it. I could do anything now. At first you're a little scared, but like I said, I can get a few drinks in me and get up there and just do it. Back in the day it was a little weird to get up there and do that stuff. It's all preparation, man: if you're prepared, you don't have to worry about it. It takes a lot of the fear out of the way...

Schmaltz: ...But it's hard to get rid of it completely.

51:53 Duprie: Sure it is. You never know...you always feel weird getting up and doing something like that. What if nobody likes it? What if someone throws something or whatever?

Schmaltz: Hopefully nobody has ever thrown anything.

Duprie: They have not. Not yet.

Schmaltz: I imagine that would be quite frustrating...not frustrating so much as a downer.

Duprie: That's a good thing about having some of these fans who are so loyal. I think if someone threw something at me, someone would probably kill them.

They would probably drag them outside and beat the shit out of them without me having to say anything (laughs). That's just part of it. When you put yourself out there...that's it. Don't be mad if people don't like it. You're putting yourself out there, it comes with the territory, right?

Schmaltz: Have you ever had to deal with a critic; anyone who said, "I just don't agree with what this says?"

Duprie: Yeah. I have a good story for you. When I put my first record out, the editor of Metro Times...his name was Bill Holdship...it wasn't by any of my doing, for some reason I started blowing up around here. Everybody was talking me, you know? They asked me to play at the Detroit Music Awards...in '06 or '07 I think... they asked me to play at the Detroit Music Awards. This guy writes a review of the Detroit music awards, the editor Bill Holdship. We close out the show, and this is...you have to remember this guy was watching a 4 hour show that wasn't that great. We get up at the end and we kind of...it wasn't that great, what we did. The way they had this whole thing set up wasn't that good. He slammed us in Metro Times. I had never got anything written about me or anything. Me being the way I was growing up, I was like, "I'm going to fuck this mother fucker up. I'm going to find him and get him...kick his ass." Jim Diamond says, "don't do that. You need to calm down and chill out. Think about it." Here's what I did: I wrote the dude an email. I said, "look man, I've seen what you wrote about me. I want you to know that I've been working very hard at this for a long time." This was the first email I ever wrote about myself, and I said, "I know you're probably tired of this and that, and it was a long night. Why don't you do me a favor? Let me send my record over to you and see what you think?" He hit me back and said, "yeah, it was a long night. I apologize if I said anything wrong. Why don't you send me your record and we'll see what happens?" So I send him my record and I don't hear anything out of him for forever. Right about before the first of the New Year coming up he sends me an email saying, "Hey Don! I got your record. I'm sorry it's taken me so long, but listen: This record is excellent. What I put up about you in the paper..." Now here's a guy who's written for the Rolling Stones and everything he's written has made him a hard-ass. Say what you want, it's more or less true of critics in my opinion. He said, "I'm going to make it up to you." I remember on New Years I was working at the fire department. I was going to take my girlfriend out to...this was back when they had the Metro Town everywhere in print...I'm looking for somewhere nice and new to eat that opened up. It said, "best of the year." I'm looking at it and I say, "ooh, music." I'm looking and there's a top ten list.

Number 1 on that list was my record. He sent me an email saying, "I want you to know that this is me making up for that." I just remember going...I touched everyone. That's the thing: when you put this stuff out there and the critics don't like it, that's what's up. You put it out, and you put your name on it. You have a decision to make: If you put it out there and someone doesn't like it, then they



decision to make. If you put it out there and someone doesn't like it, then they don't like it. That's what you set yourself up for. A lot of people take that stuff hard, but right now I'm a little frustrated because I can't even...I did a lot stuff around here and I can't even get records reviewed around here. It's kind of weird. I got written about in the Rolling Stones and a local rag won't even write about me. It's kind of weird, you know? I hope you got the gist of that story with Bill the critic. He's a good man, though. I really respect him, even to this day.

**56:30** Schmaltz: It really shows the importance of keeping a cool head.

Duprie: That's it. Always keep a cool head through hell, right?

Schmaltz: I myself have trouble with that. It's not always easy, but you pulled it off really well and because of that you got your number one spot.

Duprie: Yeah, it's pretty neat, man.

Schmaltz: That must have felt pretty good.

Duprie: Yeah. The next year we put up another record and a couple years later we got the number 2 record of the year, which was...like I said, it made you feel good. It's all golden, man. Like you said, let cooler heads prevail. (brief pause) We can wrap it up if you want, brother. I should get my car out of there before I get a ticket. I parked in 2 hour parking.

Schmaltz: Oh. Well, I would hate to financially inconvenience.

Duprie: Oh, it's alright.

Schmaltz: I think this pretty much covers everything I would like to cover.

Duprie: Yeah. It was good, man. You did a great job, bro.

Schmaltz: I'd like to thank you for taking the time to set this up and do the interview and all that.

Duprie: Thank you for having me. I've had a great time.

Schmaltz: Alright.

Duprie: Alright!

**58:17**

