

## ROBBIE DUPREE AND DAVID SANCIOUS

When true artists collaborate, the resulting whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. This will never be more evident than Friday night when music veterans Robbie



Dupree and David Sancious bring their elegant and soulful duet to the Rosendale Cafe. Dupree, the Brooklyn crooner and Sancious, the keyboard genius from the Jersey shore, have been making music together for nearly two decades. Though the two grew up miles apart,

in some aspects, they grew up the same way. Both were always the youngest, the smallest kid in class, tagging along with the big boys. And music was a key to acceptance, a social equalizer. Sancious started school at four in middle-class Belmar, guided by a school-teacher mother. Dupree skipped some grammar school grades and started high school at twelve.

For Dupree, it was the older doo-wop singers on the street corner that he studied and emulated; in a wise guy world not unlike that in "A Bronx Tale". Sancious had two older brothers and a father who took him to hear the top players of the day in jazz and R and B, at the Orchid Lounge on the wrong side of the tracks in Asbury Park.

The roads from Belmar and Brooklyn converged in Woodstock in 1985, passing through fame and interesting fortune along the way. Sancious was an original member of Bruce Springsteen's E Street band and became the keyboardist of choice for a host of artists from Sting to Clapton.

Dupree headed a succession of east coast rock and soul bands until a California-made solo record caught fire and earned him a best new artist Grammy nomination and two hit singles ("Steal Away" and "Hot Rod Hearts").



Their first collaboration was on Robbie's "This Is Life", a memorial to Robin DeLisio that was produced as a public service anti-drunk driving video by Brian Hollander. Over the years, Sancious arranged and played on many of Dupree's sophisticated CD's. It was natural evolution for the two to perform as a duo, reinventing the music as an intimate nightclub act. Raves followed

and a CD will be released this summer.

Interviewed separately last week, both artists said they feel lucky to have been born in an era of cultural and musical greatness. Dupree cites, “Joni Mitchell, the Beatles, Coltrane, Hendrix... the reason I played, and spent my life trying to be worthy of those standards. I was lucky just to be there. Those were things that were laid down and stayed down.”

Over a sandwich and fries at the Woodstock Golf Club’s Cafe S, Sancious told me, “I look back and thank God that I was not born a second past 1953! On a curve musically and socially that was a great ride—the post-war vibe, the New Deal and GI bill. People could improve their lives radically. Free college education... My father took advantage and made a nice life for us.”

Belmar, he said, has the most beautiful beach in New Jersey and was a great place to grow up. His father was an electronic engineer who taught radar to soldiers at Fort Monmouth, and built and maintained missile systems. Also a closet piano player, as David was astonished to learn one day when the elder Sancious thought himself alone at home. By that time, both David and his mother were intimidatingly accomplished players. Indeed, his mother was “a great classical player” who began teaching him at six. She passed him along to a colleague later on and he continued to study privately, eventually finding everything he needed to know in books on orchestration, composition and theory.

He knew from age seven that his life would be in music. At nine, he had a jazz band. He took up the guitar when he was eleven, under the powerful influence of Jimi Hendrix’s “Are You Experienced?” And for awhile would only play in bands that let him play guitar. At fourteen, he quit school to play music full time. But he emphasizes, “Do NOT quit school! I had a very unique and not replicable situation! I played everywhere. Rock and roll in white clubs, R and B and jazz in black clubs.”

One night he jammed at The Upstage with his friend, bassist Gary Tallent and a new acquaintance named Bruce Springsteen. From then on, he toured and recorded with the E Street band, making three records between 1973 and 1975, culminating in “Born To Run”. But he was always writing his own music and so he turned to recording it. “Forest of Feelings”, “Transformation” and “The Speed of Love” for Epic; “True Stories” and “Just As I Thought” for Arista; then a solo piano record, “The Bridge” for Elektra. He toured behind the records he describes as “my own blend of classical harmony and modern rhythm.”

Sought as a session player, Sancious recorded and toured with Sting, Peter

Gabriel and Seal in the '90's. Formed by "everything from Mozart to James Brown," he says he's never lost "the fun of it." And he's especially thrilled by the work with Dupree.

"I've always loved supporting a singer. It started with Bruce," he said. "It's an art to interpret a song and still be yourself. I really enjoy re-interpreting hit singles to something more introspective and easy to believe in... Those life elements we've all brushed up against."

Dupree says the new duo versions of his music are "a distillation... It's all there. The beauty is it makes it sound like the genesis of a song." It's no small feat to pare well-loved music down to the two instruments of voice and piano with nothing lost in the translation.

The rich and subtle body of work Dupree has created over his 30-year career has deep roots in the neighborhoods of his youth. It was a time and place when, for example, boxing was as much a high school sport as basketball. "We lined up by height in the gym. Hundreds of boxing gloves were handed out and you sparred with the guy next to you."

His grandfather was a professional boxer and it's a discipline Dupree has continued both in California and in a gym in his Woodstock garage. "It's part of my meditation," he told me. "It signifies a lot of time alone, working to a goal only seen in public for brief moments. It's like the loneliness of road work and in that, has a correlation to art."

He's also known for his acerbic wit. Asked if that might have grown out of being a boy among men, he said, "Without a doubt. You had to laugh your way out if you couldn't fight your way out."

Prepare to laugh and cry if you come to the Rosendale Cafe on Friday night. It will be a kind of full-circle for Dupree. "My first gigs in the area were right across the street at The Well. From a biker joint to a health food place!" Perhaps that sums up the shift from the Seventies to today. But Dupree says this area has been pivotal to his career. He's lived longer now in his adopted home than in his birthplace, and this melting pot of music in the mountains has been bountiful.

Though Sancious' meditation is yoga and gardening and Dupree knows the zen of boxing, they make beautiful music together. It's an astonishing work in progress.