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Music is in the blood

Leah Felder, daughter of Eagles guitarist Don Felder, carries on dad's genes with the band, Big Dume.

By Sean Caffey / Special to The Malibu Times

Lifetime Malibu resident Leah Felder, daughter of Don Felder, longtime guitarist for the legendary rock group the Eagles, has known from a pretty young age what she wanted to be when she grew up.

"Growing up, there was just a whole lot of music in the house," she said. "My father, my brother, everyone in my family plays music; I was basically born into it.

"I remember my dad opening up the Hell Freezes Over tour," Felder continued. "I was 11 years old, and knew he was going out on the road, but I never knew to what caliber of a musician he really was. It was a huge, dark stadium-I don't even remember which one-I just remember the energy of the place. My dad kissed me on the forehead and walked out onto stage and the spotlight hit his back. From the moment he hit that first note on "Hotel California," the place just went nuts. My heart was pounding, and I knew at that point that I could make a living as a musician."

Having played in various bands over the years, Felder's latest project takes a local area name-Big Dume. Far from being a solo project, Big Dume is a collaborative effort between Felder, her boyfriend, guitarist and vocalist Brandon Jenner and drummer Chris Steele. The band was recently recognized with the Power Trio of the Year, Front Person of the Year (for Felder) and Rock Drummer of the Year awards by the increasingly popular Los Angeles Music Awards, which recognizes the accomplishments of local, independent artists. "Inside my Head," their first CD, was also nominated for Rock Album of the Year.

Jenner is also a longtime Malibu resident (he is the son of Linda Thompson, who was married to music producer David Foster, and Olympic Gold medalist, Bruce Jenner).

"I have known Leah since elementary school and have been friends with her for a long time," Jenner said of his relationship with Felder. "Now that we are in a relationship and playing in the best band in the Virgo supercluster together, it is like a dream come true."

On playing with Felder and the band, Jenner said: "I feel like the luckiest guy in the world. I play music with people that I look up to musically and personally. I have always looked up to Leah as a musician because her journey runs so much deeper than just technique. She has true passion, more than me, and that's why I look up to her."

Felder related an incident which foreshadowed the band's achievements at the Los Angeles Music Awards: "We played this charity event at the Canyon Club, and after we played, this guy came up to us in a suit-you know, another suit-you never really take it seriously because you



Drummer Chris Steele, Brandon Jenner (vocals, guitar and keyboard) and Leah Felder (vocals, keyboard) of the band Big Dume. The group received several Los Angeles Music awards this year.

heard it a million times, but he called us a week later and says, 'you guys are going to win Power Trio of the Year,'" Felder recalled. "It was totally out of the blue but it was something we really needed."

The band's creative process stems from a number of different sources.

"The songwriting happens in a bunch of different ways," Felder said. "Sometimes the drummer is sitting in his room and then comes in and says he has a song he wants us to work on or we're all sitting around drinking some wine and a song just comes together. Everyone in the band writes and it brings a lot of different elements to it."

When asked if her songwriting comes from a personal place, Felder had this to say: "Absolutely, one hundred percent. It's completely therapeutic in every single way, whether I'm writing it or performing it on stage. I don't know who or what I'd be without it."

In terms of her father's influence, Felder said she heard a great deal of his music growing up and that it inevitably had some effect on her. However, Felder is quick to point out that she is definitely doing her own thing.

"I would have to say that I've heard a whole lot of Eagles music and his talent is in my blood," she said. "But I'm a 23-year-old woman and I've taken it down a totally different road. The music I like to listen to and the music I like to play are a little bit different. If I'm sitting on the couch at home, I might like to hear some bluesier stuff, but if I'm on stage it's a little bit heavier. It's like if I'm driving and I want to go fast, I'll listen to Rage Against the Machine, but if I'm stuck in traffic I might listen to Bill Withers or Stevie Wonder."

Big Dume has toured nationally in support of their first record, and currently have about 15 songs in the works for a follow up album. Felder said she hopes they will be out on the road again by the early part of next year.