
BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Raiding the Refrigerator of Jazz Musician (and Peanut Butter Lover) Dan Knight

STORY AND PHOTO BY ROB CLINE

Dan Knight is a pianist and composer whose performance credits include three consecutive appearances at the famed Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland. While his schedule takes him around the country and beyond, he also finds time to perform in a variety of venues closer to his Iowa City home. Though perhaps best known as a jazz musician, his interests—musical and otherwise—are quite diverse. For example, he recently released a recording of “The Walt Whitman Suite,” a composition that merges poetry from “Leaves of Grass” with Dan’s hybrid of classical and jazz inflected music.

Just in time for this past Christmas, Dan composed a jazz number for my son, a 10-year-old jazz aficionado. Dan premiered the piece, “A Song for Bryan Cline,” during his most recent “Jazz at Riverside” performance, a tribute to the great Bill Evans. In his introduction to the piece, he called Bryan, “tragically hip”—a compliment of the first order for a jazz fan.

How to repay such a kindness from an artist? It seemed only appropriate that I would honor him in my own artistic setting—by composing a paean to the contents of his refrigerator.

THAT’S NOT SKIPPY

There’s a large jar with a blue and white label in the Knight refrigerator. A quick glance might lead to the conclusion that Dan and his wife Julie have mistakenly refrigerated their Skippy... or that they are terribly fond of Miracle Whip. But this is no sandwich spread. This is Vita herring.

Julie Knight is of Norwegian stock, and while Vita Food Products is a Chicago company, Dan’s impulse to eat the herring comes from two trips to Norway to visit his wife’s cousin. Dan acquired a taste for herring as well as for *gjetost*—caramelized goat cheese.

“It looks really gross until you eat it, and then it tastes wonderful,” Dan reports.

The Knights get their *gjetost* at New Pioneer Co-op in Iowa City.



Dan Knight and some of his favorites

A packet of *Tyttebaer*, another Norwegian treat, can also be found in the Knights’ refrigerator. The fruit, which is apparently dried cranberry, is a deep red and looks as though it might be delicious with peanut butter.

And while the blue and white jar in the icebox might not be peanut butter, Dan keeps a sizeable jar of Jif Extra Crunchy in the easily accessible. He calls it a “staple of my existence,” and Julie confirms this, revealing that her husband eats a peanut butter sandwich over the sink most every day.

“If it wasn’t for me,” says Julie, “Dan would eat three meals or more a day over the sink. He eats over the sink because then he doesn’t have to clean up his own crumbs.”

Self-described “vegetable freaks,” the Knight refrigerator is generally a repository of broccoli, cauliflower,

peppers, cucumbers, various kinds of lettuce and whatever else is in season. As for meat, there isn’t much to speak of, with the exception of some Hillshire Farm Deli Select ham. It isn’t there so Dan could have a sandwich sans peanut butter. The ham is for their bichon friese, Emily.

Apparently, she loves to play hide and seek with the ham. “Emily stays in the kitchen,” Julie explains, “and we hide the meat and she finds it. It’s her favorite game.”

The lack of meat, the emphasis on vegetables, the Omega3-rich herring indicate the Knight foodstuffs are pretty darn healthy. And that health-conscious theme continues with Dan and Julie’s breakfast cereal of choice: Uncle Sam Cereal. A visit to www.US-MillsInc.com reveals that Uncle Sam Cereal (“A unique blend of toasted whole grain wheat flakes and whole flaxseed.”) is approved for the Snack Factor Diet, the Gold Coast Cure, and the South Beach Diet. The Knights insist that it tastes good, too.

As I snapped my final photograph and gathered up my notes, Dan sent me on my way with not one, but two of my favorite indulgences: Dove Miniatures featuring ice cream dipped in Dove chocolate. Dan made sure I had both a chocolate and a vanilla treat. I must admit I was pleased to be leaving with ice cream rather than herring and *gjetost*.