



Tracy Wormworth talks about auditioning for the Stones, getting an upright sound on electric, and becoming instantly sexy

What caused you to pursue what had been considered a traditionally “male” instrument, the bass? Did you consider it as such?

I was inspired to play bass by hearing and seeing Marcus Miller. I never viewed the bass as a gender-specific instrument. However, I believe once one becomes a bass player, one becomes instantly sexy!

You were part of the seminal Eighties band the Waitresses.

How did that come about?

The Waitresses came together in Akron, Ohio. Their original bassist, Dave Hofstra, wanted to pursue other musical interests after the release of their hit, “I Know What Boys Like.” A friend of [bandleader] Chris Butler spotted me walking down the street with my bass and gave me Chris’s number, and the rest is the rest!

Your recording and performing credits go all the way from Wayne Shorter and Regina Carter to Sting and the B-52’s.

What is the most important thing that prepared you for such a varied career?

When I first started playing I was lucky enough to have my brother, James, and my father, who are both professional drummers, turn me on to great music. My father used to play all types of music in the house. That exposure and support was extremely important.

What’s your bass and amp setup these days? Is there a difference between your setup with the B52’s and Joan Osborne, with whom you also tour?

I’m using an Atelier Z 5-string [from Japan] with the B’s, and an SWR-SM900 through two SWR 4x10 cabs.

With Joan I use my Sadowsky 4-string through an Eden rig.

Tell me about your audition with the Rolling Stones after Bill Wyman left!

I had just finished a gig in Philadelphia and was standing in the hotel lobby waiting to check out when someone behind the desk said I had a phone call. When I got on the phone a “spokesperson for the Stones” said that he had Mick Jagger on the line. I assumed it was a prank but went along with it, and sure enough it was Mick! He asked if I would be interested in coming to audition for the band, and of course I said yes! I went and met the guys, played the songs, and jammed a blues. It was really cool. I’m so glad I didn’t freak out!

As an accomplished jazz player and a rocker, how would you describe your approach to each style, in terms of sound and note choices?

Well, with jazz I’m well aware that the sound of the upright bass is the standard, so I usually end up using a muting technique to emulate that sound. And there is more of an emphasis on not only outlining the chord changes in a tune, but contributing harmonically, as well. With rock it’s all about the feel, and I find that less is more—less grace notes, less leading tones, stuff like that.

What advice do you have for women trying to break in as side musicians?

Always surround yourself with musicians that are better than you. That way you stay challenged. Also, listen to the greats in whatever genre you choose to work in.

DAVID YELLEN



MIKE VISCEGLIA is the bassist and musical director for Suzanne Vega. His self-published book, *A View from the Side*, featuring interviews with Marcus Miller, Will Lee, and others, is available at mikevisceglia.com.