

Greg Bone

Summary by Paul Irving

Greg was born in Hartlepool in 1962. His father was a shipwright and his mother a housewife. His interest in music began at a very early age. He recalls his mother putting him to bed to the sound of Beatles records. Wanting to play the guitar and having a career in music are ambitions he has always had.

Greg initially played the drums, the only instrument he has had lessons for, but he eventually transferred to the guitar on which he is entirely self-taught. He finds playing the guitar comes naturally to him.

His career in the music business began in working men's clubs which he played in up and down the country. Eventually he joined a band in which Rick Taylor, who played trumpet and trombone, featured. Rick invited Greg to play on one of his recordings. This was Greg's first session and he sees session work as being simply the opportunity to earn a wage.

Greg fell into session work almost by accident. He has assumed his career would revolve around playing in bands but after being invited to "sit-in" for a tour and recording session he found that led to more work in recording studios. The first studio he worked in was Strawberry studios owned by the band 10CC .

All his work has come by word of mouth. He has never employed an agent or fixer.

Greg has played many genres of music but has specialised mainly in pop music. When he started session work in the early 1990s there was a particular demand for guitar sounds made using a wah-wah pedal-a technique he found came easily to him and this led to yet more work. He became more versatile and he often found that he could add value to the tracks he played on especially when the artist or producer were not sure what they wanted.

The main challenge for Greg as a session musician has always been the possibility of being asked to perform something which he can't play. This has never actually happened because he is normally hired for what he can do. Usually the backing tracks including the rhythm, bass and drums, have been already laid down. This might also include strings and other solos for example sax players.

Greg feels that the main qualities that a session musician needs are being able to get on with colleagues and the technical ability to contribute to a track without overplaying his role. The atmosphere on his sessions has been supportive rather than competitive. The orchestral musicians will be readers with formal music training who rely on the conductor to help them produce what is required. The brass players are also highly skilled musicians who are readers and are also able to improvise parts to provide sympathetic accompaniments. Although Greg himself is not a reader, other guitarists and bass players sometimes do and are all able to play a wide range of music.

The amount of socialising taking place depends on the background of the musicians. Those in an orchestra will interact in a different way to other musicians.

The working hierarchy of a recording studio is headed by the producer. Greg explains that the producer will point him in the right direction and tell him if he is satisfied with the results. Usually he finds that it is a process, although one which can have its frustrations if the artist or producer is not clear what they want.

Greg worked often at SARM West studios in Notting Hill (previously Basing Street studios owned by Island). The studio was owned by Trevor Horn and Greg worked on records by Take That and Kylie Minogue there during the 1990s when it almost became like a second home and is therefore a special place when he reflects on his career. Although the atmosphere varies from studio to studio, Greg feels that the most important factor are his colleagues working on the session. Collaboration with other musicians creates the most effective vibes.

Payment for session work was based on an hourly rate although a session usually comprised of a three hour period. It is rare to be paid more for coming up with a riff or idea for an arrangement, however Greg was paid a double rate once after agreeing to play the bass as well as his normal guitar part.

Although it is not often that session musicians are given accreditation for their work, Greg recalled a session with Sting who insisted that the session players' names appeared on the recording credits.

Although the Musicians Union has not figured significantly in his career, the benevolent fund helped him when he broke his hand and he is positive about the potential role a union can play.

The main challenge or concern that session work can present is being asked to perform something he can't play. The pressures of session work can present other challenges for musicians such as alcohol and substance abuse which Greg has observed. As he says, "it's rock and roll" and that's the way some people function.

Greg has successfully managed to balance his musical commitments and live work has only clashed with his session work on one occasion. However, he is always keen to prioritise work as many engagements can lead to other opportunities. Indeed, he finds session work enjoyable on the whole whilst being aware that it is a major source of income and important basis of his livelihood.

There is much satisfaction to be gained from session work, particularly where Greg feels that his contribution has resulted in something developing from being good to being great. He especially recalls sessions being done with Sting where the producer wanted Greg to replace Sting's regular guitarist for one engagement and he and the other musicians had great fun working together in a relaxed environment which produced some excellent music.

Greg outlined some of the technical changes which have occurred in recent years. When he first started session work it was common for valve amplifiers to be used. Later, developments resulted in the use of amp modelling where his guitar would be plugged directly into a device which could reproduce a variety of effects. There was a brief return to basic amplifiers, which always sound good, before technology improved again.

A lot of Greg's work is now recorded remotely-as he says-many records are now made in people's bedrooms which has, of course, led to the closure of many of London's famous recording studios. Although he is used to playing with drum machines and click tracks, He feels that nothing can best the vibe group of musicians playing together live which generates a certain chemistry which does not exist otherwise. He has many guitars and will often receive requests from people he has worked with to bring a particular model because of its sound.

Greg would not advise anybody to seek a career working as a session musician as working conditions and remuneration are very different now.

Looking back, being a session musician has been a very important part of his life and one in which he feels fortunate to be involved in. When a track is played on the radio on which he has featured he gets a lot of professional satisfaction and feeling of pride in his contribution.