

THE LEGENDARY SIDEMAN

WOODWIND PLAYER JIM HORN IS ONE of the world's greatest session musicians. Few, if any, living musicians can boast such stellar credits: Elvis and Elton. Sinatra and Sting. Waylon and Wynonna. The Stones, the Who, Bob Dylan, and all four members of the Beatles. He was once told by Bruce Springsteen that he is, in fact, a legend.

Horn made his mark in the '60s as part of the Wrecking Crew, the famed Los Angeles studio team. There he played on countless hits, often contributing immortal melodic hooks. He relocated to Nashville in 1983, where he remains a tireless sideman, playing on hit after hit and crisscrossing the globe with high-profile tours and sessions.

Fresh off a United States and Canadian tour with Kenny Chesney, the affable Horn shared recollections of some of his most memorable collaborations.

SWINGING WITH SINATRA. "We'd spend a whole session rehearsing, so when Sinatra came in at 7:00 p.m., all we'd have to do is play it through and not make mistakes. He always started by coming over to say hi to the horns. He'd say, 'Nice to have you here. Just call me Frank. See that bar over there? Go have one drink, and that's it. Then get your asses back here, and I'll try to knock out the songs for you so you guys won't hurt your chops.' A couple of us had a drink, but most of us were afraid to drink before we had to work."





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GOOD VIBRATIONS. “With the Beach Boys on *Pet Sounds*, Brian Wilson would ask you to play all your instruments, because he didn’t know what they were going to sound like until he heard them all. He’d record everything in little pieces and then edit it all together. On ‘Good Vibrations,’ we’d work on eight bars on one session, take a break, then come back and work on another eight bars. He was very creative.”

SAX FOR THE JACKSONS. “I worked with Michael when he was ten or twelve years old, and he was the cutest little guy. I walked in with my baritone sax case, and he said, ‘What’s in there? Can I see it?’ So I got it out and played it for him. He said, ‘Wow, man!’ And then they went back in the studio and listened to us overdub the horns.”

MEET THE BEATLES. “I got to work with each one of the Beatles individually. The first was George Harrison. He flew me over to his house to work on *All Things Must Pass*, playing with Bobby Keys and Jim Price. Next was Ringo. He’s so easy to work with! I asked, ‘What do you want me to write on these songs?’ and he said, ‘You’re the horn player—just go ahead and write what you want!’ Then I worked with John Lennon on the Pussy Cats record he made with Harry Nilsson. That was crazy! Everybody was just partying back then, so that was a different kind of session.”

Then I worked with Paul. When he met me he said, ‘You’ve worked with everyone else; now it’s time to work with me.’ We ran the song a couple times, and then he said, ‘Everybody take a break. Jim, stay here, and we’ll work on your parts.’ I thought, ‘Oh, God, I must not have played anything right!’ But he sat down on the piano, played the song and said, ‘Okay, you enter in here, but with *this* melody. Then come in here with this other melody. Now go tell the keyboard player to come in.’ So each guy went in to learn his parts, and the rest of us would just sit in the kitchen talking to Linda. About an hour later, we all went in together and ran it down in two takes. Paul was very smart, the way he planned that whole session.”

SESSION WORK, THEN AND NOW. “Back when I worked on the West Coast, we did everything live, with the singer, the horn section, the strings, the background singers, the rhythm section. I did all the Phil Spector sessions, and when Tina Turner came in to do ‘River Deep, Mountain High,’ she stood right there behind the horn section in the vocal booth while the whole band played. Back then we read all our arrangements, and nobody made mistakes. Now it’s easy to punch in and fix mistakes. And nowadays the artist lets the rhythm section cut a track, and *then* they decide whether it should have horns. It’s a whole different type of recording, and you don’t usually have that real connection between all the players.”

YAMAHA HORNS. “I’m playing all Yamaha instruments. I’ve got a soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone sax, plus an alto flute, a C flute, and now I’ve ordered a bass flute. They just play great. Picking one up is like driving a brand new car. It handles great. It *smells* great. Yamaha instruments practically play for you. It’s almost like they *make* you sound good. I especially love the Z Series tenor sax I’m playing with Kenny Chesney. It’s silver, it looks good onstage, and it plays great!”