

Richard Anderson Jr. owns the most patriotic guitar in the world

Written by By Rick Abasta For the Sun
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He turned his love for guitars into a lifestyle

Richard Anderson Jr. spends his days surrounded by guitars, thanks to his work as a guitar tech at Juggernaut Music repairing stringed instruments. He couldn't be happier.

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The guitar has been the salvation for his life. An introduction to the electric guitar at the age of 14 provided an outlet for expression.

“I used to get beat up all the time in high school,” Andersen said. “I went to Mission Academy in Farmington. It was rough. Music was the only thing I had.”

Albums like “Alive II” by KISS and “Frampton Comes Alive” by Peter Frampton made an indelible impression on Andersen, and formed his vision to pursue the musician’s life.

“When I first heard Jimi Hendrix...I never heard a guitar sound so beautiful in my life. The music was coming out from his heart and soul,” he said of his early inspirations.

PURSUING A DREAM

Upon graduating from high school, Andersen moved to Hollywood and attended the Musicians Institute College of Contemporary Music, where he gained the foundation for his music career.

At the Musicians Institute, he learned music theory, ear training, harmony, and performance.

“They taught me a lot about music, including playing live. I was just trying to learn the business and found out that the music business is wicked. If you have a weak heart and thin skin, it’s going to eat you up,” he said.

Eventually, Anderson began playing as a hired gun throughout California with bands like Haight-Ashbury, Redbone, and Thunderhand Joe and the Medicine Show.

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“I was in LA for 10 years, just playing music,” he said. It’s a sad life. Most of the time you want to do your own thing, but you have to survive. I’d play for as many bands as I could and make \$40 here and \$20.”

Surviving those lean years provided opportunity, however, and Anderson performed at renowned venues like Whisky a Go Go, Troubadour, Gazzarri’s, the Roxy Theater, and others.

In 1999, he moved back home. Soon after, Mother Earth Blues Band was formed. Anderson started the band with his nephew, Merlin “The Wizard” Yazzie.

“We had two guys from Hopi playing with us and it was a really good band. We had good gigs and we were getting hired for shows in different cities before it all fell apart,” he said. “The drummer and singer got hooked on stuff and they couldn’t shake it.”

When the band imploded, he nearly gave up on music. Thankfully, he met singer Chucky Begay and pursued newfound inspiration.

“She made me want to play again. She pulled me out of a really dark place. She changed my life around,” he said.

The duo wrote songs together, including “Someone Like You,” “Female Rain,” and “Long Walk.”

“We still perform to this day. These days, we play with a lot of different players, many of them professional hands from other bands,” he said.

The most prized possession for Anderson is a 1971 Fender Telecaster that he calls the “Most Patriotic Guitar in the World.” The guitar bears the signatures of various Navajo Code Talkers.

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“These are the men who gave us all the freedom that we enjoy today. These men sacrificed their lives for the freedom of rock and roll. The guitar is made in America, too. You can’t get more patriotic than that.”

“I’d like to have it displayed in a museum,” he added.

Anderson’s songwriting guitar is a 1963 Gibson Les Paul. His all-purpose third guitar is a 1993 Peavey that was signed by Buddy Guy, Buffy Sainte Marie and Bill Miller.

“They say God looks out for fools and I guess I’m the biggest fool of all because there’s no way I could afford these guitars,” he said. “Each one of my guitars is a blessing. If these guitars could talk ...”

These days, Anderson is performing with the Navajo Wranglers, a local outlaw country band. Recently, the band recorded tracks at Juggernaut Music, which opened a recording studio component for the shop.

“I’ve been working on new material, native pride kind of songs. I’m hoping to have some guest rappers on these tracks to express native pride and our native world today,” he said.

For now, Anderson is content to be surrounded by guitars and sitting in with visiting bands headlining at the venue. The struggle is real, but in the end, the love of music is the basis for survival through good times and bad.

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