

DreamPath Podcast
Transcript of Interview with Musician Jeff Hamilton
Host, Bryan G. Smith
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Bryan: Bryan Smith here, and welcome to the DreamPath Podcast, where I try to get inside the heads of talented creatives from all over the world. My goal is to demystify and humanize the creative process and make it accessible to everyone. Now let's jump in.

Bryan: Jeff Hamilton's on the show today. Jeff is a multi-instrumentalist audio recording engineer, live audio engineer, tour manager, stage tech and touring side man for bands like Uriah Heep and Dennis DeYoung from Styx. He's also a member of multiple bands, one of which is about to embark on an international tour with dates in Montreal, Canada, and Moscow, Russia. Jeff played with the Violent Femmes for 10 years and also served as their producer and audio engineer on their "We Can Do Anything" album and on their Happy New Year EP. If you grew up in the 80's or even the 90's you probably remember the Violent Femmes hits Blister in the Sun and Added Up, which many say defined the early to mid 80's sound and vibe with a minimalist style of punk rock that really transcended punk and made its way into the musical consciousness of just about every young person from that era.

Bryan: In this interview, we hear how Jeff met the Femmes and was brought in as a touring musician with them as well as their audio engineer and producer for studio albums. We also hear about Jeff's current band Beatallica, an internationally acclaimed Metallica-Beatles tribute band that really defies explanation in words. Just go to YouTube, Spotify, or Apple music to hear what this band is all about. They are hilarious, but also super talented and hugely popular around the world. In this interview, Jeff tells the tale of Beatallica's legal confrontation with Sony music and the unlikely superstar musicians who cheered Beatallica on and help them prevail in that battle. In addition to this long list of accomplishments, Jeff has also recorded in iconic studios around the world, including Electric Lady in New York city and Brown bear in Nashville. He is also hired to build recording studios and in fact built his own amazing studio in Milwaukee called Hamtone Audio

Bryan: When Jeff is not touring or recording albums, he serves as the audio engineer for the NBA team the Milwaukee Bucks, and just recently started performing a solo act of original music. Jeff has been all in as a musician and recording engineer since about the age of 12. It was a lot of fun hearing about his journey and how he maintained a foothold in music for so many decades, despite the fact that music is one of those industries that really spits you out if you don't have what it takes, including talent, grit, creativity, and perseverance. So please enjoy this wide ranging interview with Jeff Hamilton.

Bryan: All right Jeff Hamilton, welcome to the podcast.

Jeff: Hey, how you doing? Thanks for having me.

Bryan: I'm great, thanks for being on the show. We are going to talk your musical career and your recording career. And to kick things off, I wanted to share my frame of reference for the conversation. I guess my biggest frame of reference is the Violent Femmes and going back to the early to mid 80s when I first became, I guess I developed a musical consciousness in terms of rock and punk and what was happening in that era and listened to the Violent Femmes and heard them at my school dances, and really appreciated the unique vision they had in terms of taking a very simple approach to musicality and music in terms of like a snare drum and an acoustic bass and just the bare essentials for putting together a band, but then also putting out just radical punk music. And that's my frame of reference. And I know that you played with the Violent Femmes for many years and I just wanted to share with you how much I loved that band and still do love them, and deep admiration for anyone who gets the opportunity to play with that kind of band. So well done, Jeff.

Jeff: Oh, thank you.

Bryan: Yeah. So tell us, how did you first meet the band and then be invited to play with them?

Jeff: Well, everybody's from Milwaukee so, I'm actually from Philadelphia but we ended up settling in Milwaukee, but the band is from Milwaukee. So they are the big band come out of Milwaukee other than the band called the BoDeans, which was around at that time as well, and still together. And a friend of mine got the position to be their front of house engineer and they were on tour and their guitar tech had met a woman in Spain and decided to marry her and stay in Spain, and he's still there to this day and they had a child and whatnot. And anyways, so my friend recommended that I take the position. And I had actually known Victor de Lorenzo, the drummer or the original drummer, for many years because he had a recording studio here in Milwaukee as well. So I've known him through that, the music scene here in Milwaukee. And I'd met Brian Ritchie maybe one time in the mid 80s at a show, at a bar somewhere. Just said hi, you know, that kind of thing. So that's how I got my foot in the door with them.

Bryan: Nice. And what year was that?

Jeff: 2005.

Bryan: So tell us about what was going on between the 70s, when you grew up, and 2005, where you actually started playing with an iconic band like the Violent Femmes.

Jeff: Well, I got into music, I've always been into it. I have two older brothers, so that helped like being exposed to all the up and coming stuff in the 70s, which, you know, it was all happening then, you know, these brand new, you know, here's this guy David Bowie, Led Zeppelin and all these bands coming out. And me and my friends would watch these music programs called Don Kirshner's Rock Concert and The Midnight Special in addition to that too. Saturday Night Live came out in that and they had bands, you know, that was a feature thing as well. So I got exposed to all kinds of amazing music and was always drawn to music basically.

Jeff: And the guitars especially. My role in the 70s when we discovered kiss was as Paul Stanley. We would dress up and we would have air guitar concerts for the neighborhood you know, we would set up in our garage and stuff. So this is, you know, many years before I even had a guitar. So that was just how I was exposed to all that. And it was just great. And finally got a guitar around 11 or 12 and I started playing and really dedicating myself to that and like, "this is what I want to do, I'm going to be a musician."

Bryan: What was your first guitar?

Jeff: It was a Hagstrom, Hagstrom I, I think it was called, the Hagstrom II, which was a really, really cheap guitar, you know, probably cost maybe 75 or 100 bucks. And then I ended up, unfortunately in my punk years of angst and whatever, I ended up smashing that guitar.

Bryan: Hey, well done!

Bryan: One of a couple that I did, which was very liberating. Thank you, Jimmy Hendrix, for putting that into my head. Now I regret it because there's this iconic picture of David Bowie with the eyepatch when he was Ziggy as Ziggy, and he's holding this red guitar and that's the exact same guitar that was my first guitar. I was like, ah, I wish I wasn't an idiot kid and smashed that guitar.

Bryan: Oh man. Yeah. I've never heard of a Hagstrom. Is that just like, did they die out in the 80s or something?

Jeff: No, they're still around. It's a Swedish company that's been around forever, you know, since the 50s I think. And yea, they still make guitars and they're actually really good quality, mid budget stuff, you know? And it's just, ironically, I was just recently looking on reverb and eBay and all that for that guitar thinking, "Oh, I should find that and just buy another one just so I can say this is the first," you know?

Bryan: Yeah

Jeff: And they're going for like \$1,000 now.

Bryan: No way!

Bryan: Yup! and it's all because of that picture of David Bowie, which I'll send it to you. I'll send you that picture. You'll be like, Oh, I've seen that picture,

Bryan: I'd love to see it. I'd love to see it. So your two older brothers were musicians and your, your parents I assume were pretty supportive of this I guess effort to become rock stars?

Jeff: Yeah, my mother comes from a musical family. She had played piano and singing in the church and all that type of stuff. And my father, he has no musical thing whatsoever, but he was always a fan of it, you know, he turned me on to like Janis Joplin and Jim Croce

and, and all that. And my mom turned me on to Heart and Neil Young, you know, as these bands were coming out and these artists are coming out, you know,

Bryan: She sounds like a cool lady.

Jeff: Oh yeah, she's great. Paula Jean.

Bryan: Nice.

Jeff: Hey mom. Shoutout!

Jeff: And so my mom was always encouraging, you know, and it was great. We had a full band set up in the basement and we took over the basement and we'd actually have shows, you know, parties, and our neighborhood kids would watch our bands and whatnot when we were younger before we actually started playing venues and whatnot. So, yeah that was a great thing obviously, to have that encouragement, you know? But the flip side of that is like, my father and my mother were like, well, if you're going to do this, be serious about it. You know, cause it's not an easy gig, as they say.

Bryan: Yeah. Yeah. Well, it sounds like a nice healthy balance of encouragement, but also caution and they're like, hey, if you're gonna go down this road, you kind of do it right to maximize your chances of success in that space.

Jeff: Yup. Exactly. And I took it very seriously and I practiced, you know, seven, eight hours a day, just basically playing the guitar whenever I could. And the neighborhood I grew up was pretty fertile. Everybody seemed to play. So that was a cool thing, you know, we could exchange ideas and, "Hey I figured out this song, show me that chord," that kind of thing.

Bryan: That's great. So how many instruments did you become familiar with and actually get proficient in, in your younger years?

Jeff: Well I started on guitar, that was my main love, but due to the fact that my oldest brother was a guitar player, just straight up and my second oldest brother is a drummer, I wanted to fit in and play with them. They're like, well play bass, you know, so I ended up playing bass just by default. But a very good friend of mine had also been playing bass for quite some time at that point. His name is Steve Post and he was in a really popular heavy metal band that lasted a few years. They were on Roadrunner Records called Realm. They actually have a resurgence coming on. They're playing a festival, big metal festival in Europe coming up in April. But I was familiar with that instrument and I was around it through him. So I just picked up the bass just so I could be able to fit in with the gang. So like that was probably a year or so after I started playing guitar.

Jeff: So I'd been playing both pretty much equally the same amount of time and that's pretty much all I played for 10, 15 years or something like that. And then a friend of mine gave me a mandolin in that early 90s and I really fell for that. And there's an artist who lives in New York now, but he was living in Milwaukee at the time called John Kruth, who is amazing. You should check him out everybody. And he was fantastic. He's a fantastic

mandolin player. So I saw him early on and that influenced me and we became friends to this day and you know, he showed me some stuff and whatnot. And then shortly after I was playing in a band and I had recorded and produced an artist and he had a thing called a lap steel and he's like, "Hey,, I want a lap steel on a track. Can you play this?" And in this business you just say, "yes, yep, yep. I can play it." And just, I laid a track down and he loved it and he gave me this lap steel as gratitude and payment for the track, which I was floored. It's a 1939 National that I still have.

Bryan: Holy smoke.

Jeff: Yeah. And so then I started at that, I started playing lap steel a lot more. And so, those are the main instruments that I play that, you know, that I have proficiency on. Guitar, bass, mandolin and lap steel. And then just from there, I played sitar as well and one of the prerequisites for the Violent Femmes is to be on stage and whatnot, I had to play some kind of horn instrument, which I'd never have done. And so I decided to try the trumpet, which I was thinking, "Hey, this is going to be easy, just blow into it, right?" But there's this thing called embouchure that you have to get to even get a note out of it. And that took me awhile to even be able to get a note. But in the meantime it just sounded like a dying whale and whatnot. And so the Femmes guys got a kick out of it when I would play that. And I was just so bad that they ended up featuring me on some solos, you know. "Listen To how bad this is" and the crowd would go nuts cause it was just terrible.

Bryan: This is punk rock.

Jeff: Exactly. And that's with the Horns of Dilemma, which is their backing thing. If anybody sees the band, you'll see a group of people in the back, you know, they'll come up for a few songs and they just do these atonal jams, you know. For one, one of the shows I remember at the Fillmore we had 23 people playing in the Horns of Dilemma, all various horn instruments and you know, all kinds of bizarre instruments and whatnot.

Bryan: And the dilemma at the time was, is Jeff gonna get through this song?

Jeff: Exactly

Bryan: Is the audience gonna stick around?

Jeff: Like the best part about that is their traveling saxophone players. They would have guys in Europe and America. In America, it was Steve McKay from the Stooges. And so he was a super sweet guy and he loved it. He was like encouraging me and I was really bad, we'd play. But then we'd play Europe and it was Dick Perry who you would know if you're a Pink Floyd fan. He did all the saxophone on Dark Side of the Moon. And so he was the guy that I'm sitting with and he was just like, "Oh, this guy's terrible. I cant play with him" But we got along really well and h it was hilarious to me that I'm playing next to these iconic horn players or saxophone players, you know. So, super fun.

Bryan: So you were, you were touring Europe with the Violent Femmes?

Jeff: Yeah, yeah. All over. All over the world actually with them.

Bryan: And how many years did that last?

Jeff: They broke up in 2007 then got back together again in 2012 for Coachella, where they did a reunion, and then that ended up being until 2016 and then they slimmed down their world touring and whatnot and, you know, changed managements and stuff. And it ended up, I got offers to do other things that were a little bit more lucrative and I had to eat. So I ended up exiting that, but still worked with them as well and the studio and various shows where, you know, if I'm in the town that they're at or they come to Milwaukee, I'll sit in with them. So yeah, we still have a great relationship together.

Bryan: Right on. But when you're playing with the Femmes, are you in sort of in awe of the place that they hold in history? I mean you grew up in that era and I imagine because they're from the same town, they were a big part of your musical consciousness and upbringing.

Jeff: Well, actually on my end, not really. I knew about them and I went to a show. I think the only time I had seen them was in 1985 at a festival we have here called Summerfest, which is the largest musical festival in the world. You should come check it out. It's amazing. So anyways, I went to this show. These girls we were with said "let's go see this band." And we ended up dancing all night and it was super fun and that was that. At that time I was more into progressive rock, jazz and things like that, you know, so I wasn't this fawning over, "Oh my God, Violent Femmes."

Bryan: Yeah.

Jeff: You know, which, which maybe helped for me to be, you know, not awestruck when I was with them. Like who? The Violent Femmes? You guys are still around?

Bryan: Right.

Jeff: That's how I looked at it and I didn't realize the scope of it. And then obviously, you know, touring the world with them and seeing the fanatic cult fan base that they have and you know, you're in a foreign country and nobody speaks English yet they're singing all the words to the song. So I began to realize that. And it's amazing. It's super cool. You know, they have a very unique footprint in the history of music, you know, without being this major, U2 type, or you know, that type of band,

Bryan: Right? Yeah. They're not an arena type of band and they never were. But you're right. I mean, there's a cult status that I think that they still hold. And it's interesting how that works because you're in a band called Beatallica, right?

Jeff: Yup.

Bryan: Yeah. And, and it seems like, and we'll talk about that in a few minutes, but it seems like in Europe there are fan bases that really get into niche type of bands that don't make it

big in America. But, you know, I'm thinking of like, one of the classic documentaries of the last decade was Anvil. I don't know if you ever saw,

Jeff: Yup I had them at the club that I book here in town.

Bryan: Oh really?

Jeff: Yeah, recently.

Bryan: And I remember seeing that documentary and of course, I had not really heard of them when I was watching the documentary, but I see just how nuts the fans go in, was it Japan that they...? And and there's a lot of bands like that that just have these huge fan bases outside the US. And it sounds like the Violent Femmes really took advantage of that.

Jeff: Yeah. Their first platinum records were in New Zealand and Australia. They were open arms welcomed in Australia, they're worshiped over there. And Bryan Richie ended up moving to Tasmania. So he's there now and has been for quite a few years. So that was one of the stops on our tours. We would do Australia around this time of year. And what was great for me is my father and my stepmother moved to Australia in the early 80s and I had never been there until the Femmes hired me. Like hey, we're going to Australia like, Oh, I'm going to go see my dad I haven't seen in forever. And he had come out to a show that was in Brisbane where they live and we're playing and I'm featured on a bunch of backing instruments and some solos and whatnot throughout the night. And he was just astounded. He didn't know, he had never seen me play. Plus my parents were divorced since the early 70s. He knew I played, but he never actually saw me perform. So that was a really cool thing for me to be able to go to this and see my father, connect with my father, and it was all through music.

Bryan: Yeah, that's fantastic. And you get to travel the world and see places that you would never otherwise see.

Jeff: Well one of the things when I was younger is I didn't want to go anywhere. I made this like pact, I don't want to go to New York city unless I'm going there with a band, going and playing. And I didn't want to go to LA unless I was going there with a band playing or producing a record or something like that, and all of that happened. So that's really cool.

Bryan: That's awesome. Yeah, I sort of made that pact about the Sundance film festival. I went there one time a long time ago and it was like, you know what, I don't want to come back here unless I'm invited. I want to be part of this. I want to be part of the filmmaking community and that never happened. So I just went back as a buyer several more times. And then just recently I got invited to be part of the press there.

Jeff: Oh fantastic.

Bryan: Yeah. This is my first time going in January with press credentials.

Jeff: Oh, right on.

Bryan: Yeah. So I'll be on the red carpet.

Jeff: Yeah. Scoot past the lines.

Bryan: Yeah, it's very exciting. But the Violent Femmes work sounds like it ended in about 2016 but then you recorded with them as well, right?

Jeff: Yeah, well my touring part of it. Yeah. So you know, in the couple months of that was over the summer and we did a bunch of touring, and then shortly after that they called me up to do some recording with them in New York and we went to Electric Lady and did a live broadcast from Jimmy Hendrix's Studio, which was another incredible moment for all of us. Obviously just being in that space, playing and recording. And then I ended up recording some tracks with them at what was known as the Power Station in New York, which cranked out every album you would know in the 80s. Dire Straits' Money For Nothing, all that stuff. Sting. And so another yet another amazing studio that I got to record at with them. And then shortly after that would have been early 2017, they asked me to be their front of house engineer for the Australian tour. So it's kind of a kind of a bizarre thing. You know, I started out as a guitar tech and ended up playing with them, producing the records, then I was a front of house engineer.

Bryan: What is the front of house engineer?

Jeff: Uh the guy who mixes the band live, the live sound.

Bryan: Nice.

Jeff: Yeah. So I mean, I don't really know anybody else that has that. I haven't met anybody else that has that same type of, you know, it's kinda bizarre,

Bryan: That's a neat trajectory. And really what's so cool and I, I've looked at your bio on your website, which is hamtoneaudio.com, right?

Jeff: Yes.

Bryan: And you have the most eclectic job history that, I mean, and it's all music related. but in terms of like playing in bands and recording and also being in charge of the, you know, you're the audio engineer for the Milwaukee Bucks and you're just doing all of these things that are sound, recording, and music related. When you were 12 years old and you're picking up that Hagstrom guitar and you're listening to your older brothers play, did you envision that you would be where you are today and that you would have had that trajectory?

Jeff: No, not at that time because I simply wanted to be a guitar player and rock and roll band famous, you know, all that young type of thinking. I wanted to be good but I also wanted to be successful on guitar. And just from utilitarian aspect, I got into recording because it just, I never thought, okay, I'm going to start studying recording. You know, it really didn't exist back then. The only magazine with that was called Mixed magazine, it's very

high end, but there were no recording programs like there is today. There wasn't Full Sail recording or any of that stuff. But I never actually even thought about that as a career or anything. To me it was simply, okay, we wrote this song, now we want to record it. So the way I went about that is I had a boombox which was a cassette based thing with speakers that you carried around, for all the younger listeners,

Bryan: Nice, making me feel old now.

Jeff: Which I carried around with me all the time in school playing music, those are those days, you know, people had those. But anyways I would just set up this boombox in front of us and the band in the basement. Then we'd play the song and then I started thinking, well, I want to put a guitar solo. How do I do that? Like light bulb went off. Well, I'll just get another boombox put that at the other end of the room. Turn up what we just recorded from boombox one, crank it up really loud, put an amp in the middle of the two boom boxes, hit record on the new boombox, boombox two, and then hit play on the first one and then play along, do my solo. And that was like primitive overdubbing and you know, and that's how I did that for a while. And then a kid down the block actually got a four track cassette recorder, which was when they started to become a little bit more available to consumers and whatnot. And then I just delved into that. I would borrow that from him and you know, start recording the band and we had multi-track, we could do four tracks. I'm like, God, it's like the Beatles.

Jeff: And I learned all kinds of techniques doing stuff on that four track. And I bought one for myself several years after that. And then what happened was bands around the neighborhood, "Hey, can you record me? You know, my band?" So I'd just do that. Even then, it was never even a thought to me, it was just like part of the whole package, you know. You played instruments well you've got to record. So it's the same, you know, you just deal with it. And then a band that I was in in the early 90s called True Heart Susie which was very popular around here in Milwaukee and regionally, we were at the desk of ? Records and all that stuff, didn't get the deal, but anyways we went in to record at a studio here in town called Cornerstone Recording, which was one of the only places in town at the time. And the engineer, you know, I was very particular, what I wanted to hear and how to go about it. And, and the engineer after the sessions was like, "you're really into this, do you want a job doing this?" And I'm like, wow. Yeah. So that was my introduction into actual commercial recording studio. And I haven't looked back since, you know, I've had a studio ever since.

Bryan: Nice. It sounds like really kind of an organic journey to being a recording engineer because it's not like you're like, you know what? When I grow up, I want to be a recording engineer. It was more like, well, I want to be a bad ass musician and I want to play in bands and I want to have a body of work. And in order to do that, I need to learn how to record.

Jeff: Exactly. And then so the production side of it to me is the same type of thing. It's like I never set out, "I want to be a producer." The only reason I call myself as a producer is because someone in the band that I'm recording says, "did that sound good?" So they're actually asking my opinion, and then that would lead to, "well, yeah, I think it would sound better if you changed this chorus," you know, "change that lyric," you know? So

now I'm a producer. And then what ended up happening in about the mid 90s with these bands at that particular studio, it was, you know, Milwaukee is a very vibrant music scene here that's an incredible original music scene. So I'm recording these bands and they were like, "wow, we really like how the record sounds, can you come out and mix us live?" And I'm just like, I've never done that at all other than with the bands when I was growing up, we'd have these primitive PA's and I would end up setting that up and turning on the microphones and what not. Once again, never thinking, "I'm Going to be a live sound engineer" Once again, it's part of the, "this is what you do because you know, the people have to hear us loud, so we have to have a PA." And so then that led to me getting into the live sound end of things. And thus here I am doing, you know, for the Bucks and Marquette's and various bands and the Violent Femmes. I've toured with them doing front of house and many, many other bands

Bryan: As you may have noticed, there are great resources and advice mentioned in all our episodes. And for many of them, we actually collect all of these resources for you in one easy place, our newsletter. You can go to dreampathpod.com/newsletter to join. It's not fancy, just an email about each week's episode, featured artists and resources to help you on your journey. Thanks. And now back to the interview.

Bryan: So tell us about Beatallica.

Jeff: Beatallica. Wow. You should all go and look at the Wikipedia page cause it's a very crazy, wild story. So they're friends of mine, the band's been around since 99 or something, 2000. So here in Milwaukee we have this thing that was started in a club in the early 80s that's called Spoof Fest. And the whole premise is you get together with your buddies, pick a band and you spoof them. So the idea is to play the music as good as you can, but make fun of their history and whatnot and camp it up on stage, you know? And so there'd be skits and whatnot involved with within the show. Each band can do like 20 minutes or 30 minutes, and it's still going on to this day and it's super popular here. We sell out two nights in a row at big clubs here and whatnot.

Jeff: So back in the day as this was early on, these friends of mine got together and they decided, well let's do Beatles meet Metallica. And they got together and wrote a few songs and recorded a cassette that they're going to give out at this Spoof Fest event. And they were like early on in the bill and played their set throughout their cassettes and whatnot. The band wasn't called Beatallica at all. It was just, you know, this band. I wasn't at that particular one, so I don't remember if they named it anything. So anyways, they threw out this cassette and there was a guy in the audience that got the cassette, uploaded it onto his website, back then, which was in the early days of people having that. And he, from what I understand of the story, he got a million downloads from his site, from that cassette.

Bryan: Oh my goodness.

Jeff: And people were loving it. Then the next thing he got was a cease and desist "We're suing you" letter by Sony records. And he freaked out and the next thing he did was tracked down the singer of that and said, "Hey, you know, this is my name, blah blah. Yeah, I got that cassette and I uploaded it to my site and we have a million downloads."

And at this point, this isn't a band by the way. It was just made for a one off thing. A year later they're getting this call or like, what are you talking about? And the guy's like, "yeah, and I named it Beatallica and here's the thing, Sony's suing me for millions of dollars" and the singer is like, who is now the singer, he wasn't then cause the band didn't exist, He's like, "what the hell are you talking about?"

Jeff: And he explained this and the the singers like "what the..." you know. So somehow or another Rolling Stone or NPR got a hold of this story and did a story on it, and it was on NPR and whatnot. Then Rolling Stone, I don't know which came first, but there was an article in Rolling Stone about it. And they picked it up and Lars read that article and he tracked down the singer's home phone number and called him at home. And his wife answered, the singer's wife answered, and she wasn't a metal head. She doesn't know any of that stuff. And he's like, "yea this is Lars Ulrich from Metallica, I'm looking for a Michael Tierney." She's like, "honey, honey, there's a Lars on the phone for you" And he was in the other room and he's like, "ah, screw them. That's my friends messing with me. Just hang up." So she hangs up, Lars calls back, he's like, "this is Lars Ulrich, I want to talk to Michael about Beatallica." And she's like, what? And so finally he got on the phone and he's like, "look, quit fucking messing with me here." You know, he's about to hang up, Lars is like, "don't hang up, don't hang up."

Jeff: And then the singer is very, very, knowledgeable about all things heavy metal and Beatles and whatnot. He can tell you who played on what record and whatnot, blah, blah, blah. So they started talking and Lars is like, "you know what, fuck Sony." Excuse my French, he literally said that. And he's like, "we're going to give you our legal team for free to fight Sony, and you guys can use whatever you want from us because we think this is hilarious."

Bryan: That's great

Jeff: Yeah. And so then Sony got wind of that and they dropped the lawsuit with the caveat that they retain 100% royalties and worldwide distribution, is the story that I know. So from that then the band got signed to a label called Oglio, which is a comedy label, but also a label that would have classic rock guys like Ray Manzarek, they released a couple of his solo records. But you know, they had George Lopez as a big comedian on the record. So it's kind of this mixture of classic rock side guys and then comedy. So the band signed to them and then the worldwide distribution was through Sony, which is fantastic cause it went everywhere and all around the world. And then the booking agents started calling and 20 years later, here we are. We just signed a deal for playing a festival in Moscow coming up in May, and Montreal. And so we've been all around the world as well.

Bryan: Oh my goodness.

Jeff: So, perfect timing. So when the Femmes broke up in 2007 briefly, you know, I was back in Milwaukee, didn't have a gig. They called me and were like, "Hey, do you want to audition for this Beatallica?" My line like I used with the Violent Femmes, I said "you guys are still around?" Fortunately they didn't say, "screw off, we're getting somebody else." So I auditioned for them and the reason that happened was I was in a thrash band

called 911 back in the day, in the 80s and whatnot. And we played with everybody. Like Nirvana's first show in Milwaukee on the Bleach tour was with us on a Tuesday night at a club.

Bryan: Oh my goodness.

Jeff: And we opened up for, Fugazi's first show was with us in this 911 band.

Bryan: Wow.

Jeff: So the singers band back then opened up for us and he called me up, you know, 25 years later he's like, "Hey, do you still know how to thrash pick?" And I'm like, "yeah, of course. It's like riding a bike," you know. And so I auditioned and got the gig and now I am Grg Hammettson III of Beatallica, going on my 15th year with them.

Bryan: That's your alter ego?

Jeff: Yup, cause we all have the alter ego names. Some of them are pretty hilarious.

Bryan: That's great. So if Sony maintains a hundred percent royalties, does that mean album sales, I mean, can you guys.

Jeff: For publishing. For the publishing.

Bryan: Oh, for publishing. Okay.

Jeff: Yeah. So you still get what's called mechanical, which is very little, but the publishing is where it's at, but that was their deal. And otherwise they're like, well, we're just going to shut you down. You know, this can't exist. We're not giving you any rights to use Beatles in any way, shape or form.

Bryan: Right.

Jeff: And unfortunately what ended up happening with that was we released a few records on Ogllo and we were up for our option and they said, "yeah, we'll do another record." Some new president or something of Sony got wind of us somehow, we don't know, I think he got tagged in an email or whatever talking to our label, and he was like, "I don't know why you guys are allowed to do this. This is an abomination on the Beatles, blah, blah blah." On and on. And so when we were recording about to record our last record with Ogllo, which is called Abbey Load. They would not allow us to do our own lyrics, which we had always done, which was the whole thing. That's the part of it. Yeah. It's like making fun of the metal scene. They wouldn't allow us to do that. Their contractor with us said, you can release this record, but you have to use the original lyrics and melodies. And we went all back and forth and I was like, screw this, we're not going to do that. And I said to them, well, if we do this, then maybe we can get more opportunities for licensing for films and whatever. Because it's not a weird publishing thing, because Beatallica is strange, it's its own entity. We've talked at Harvard and Yale because it's its own thing, we're not a parody band like Weird Al, you know. We actually

take songs that I say they smell like Beatles and Metallica and we create our own songs out of it.

Bryan: Right.

Jeff: But you know, there's some songs that we do parody and we just changed the lyrics and whatnot. But anyways, that was insane, crazy stuff for publishing lawyers to deal with. And still to this day they don't know how to do it. So anyways, I talked the band into doing this last record, you know, just for the possibility. It's almost a Beatles parody so then we can get more publishing opportunities and whatnot.

Bryan: So it sounds complicated.

Jeff: Yeah. Oh yeah. For on the legal side. Absolutely. It's totally nuts.

Bryan: Well, if you guys are looking for a lawsuit on copyright infringement of your material, you may want to look at the movie Yesterday, which used Hey Dude. Just ripped it right off, didn't they?

Jeff: And we have a great story of that, of course.

Bryan: Really?

Jeff: Yes. So our video guy's nickname is Weber. And he's involved in video, although he goes all over the world and whatnot. And he loved the band early on, he's done all of our videos. And so he got wind of that and it was in that trailer, and he was at the premier in New York of that film. And he met the director and he talked to the director of that, I can't remember his name. And he was like, "Hey man, it's so great that you used a Beatallica reference, Hey Dude." and the directors like, "who?" He's like, "you don't know who that is?" And he was like, no, and he gave him the record and the guy's like, "Oh my God, this is great."

Bryan: He's like, "Oh shit".

Jeff: And that's what he said to him, he's like, "so are you guys gonna sue me? We're like, "no, no, no, it's fine. I just got a laugh." But now we're on his radar. And he was like, "yeah, I'll try to use you guys for some stuff."

Bryan: Oh that's cool.

Jeff: Yeah, and that's the bizarre thing about this band. We've got just a wide range of fans all over the world. Like Dream Theaters Mike Portnoy, the drummer, you know, he loves us. We've opened up for them. He'll play with us like literally on the drums for a few songs. It's kind of bizarre. And getting back to suing, there's actually a tribute band in South America in Brazil.

Bryan: Of Beatallica?

Jeff: Beatallica Tribute band. How does that work, you know?

Bryan: That's so meta. It's like there's so many layers to this.

Jeff: That's what I'm saying. Go do the research, it's bizarre, but it's still going, you know, we just treat it like, Oh, whatever. You know, it's every couple of years we'll get a call. And I think because of that movie our website was blowing up with messages, "Oh my God, you guys, I saw you with Ed Sheeran" and all this. So now we're getting offers again to play these major festivals all over the place.

Bryan: So how did Moscow happen?

Jeff: They just phoned up the singer. The singer handles all of that stuff and we don't actively seek out anything. Like it's...

Bryan: Like hey we need to get a gig in Moscow.

Jeff: Exactly. You know, they find us and it's always some kind of metal festival or a Beatles festival that that calls us.

Bryan: Yeah. Well that should be interesting. Would that be your first time in Moscow?

Jeff: Yes. Yep. For the whole band.

Bryan: Yeah. Be careful there man.

Jeff: Oh yeah, I know. And the Femmes didn't get out that far as well. Like Beatallica, we got out to Hungary, that was as far East as we did with Beatallica. And the Femmes, we played Istanbul, was the furthest out. So yeah, just looking forward to going to mother Russia.

Bryan: Right on. So tell me how you connected with Dennis DeYoung and Uriah Heep? Because I see that on your resume as well.

Jeff: So the Dennis DeYoung thing happened, the Violent Femmes were doing some shows in Southern California and we never carried gear, we just did what's called renting the back line, and the back line is the amps and things like that. So we carry guitars and that's it. And the company that we hired or was hired for us to provide our amps and whatnot, the guy showed up and his name is John Oshima, and he lives in San Francisco. That's his company. And he happened to be at that show and he at the time he was also tour manager for Gwen Steffani and Steve Miller and Dennis DeYoung. So and this company's a side thing, so just by chance he happened to be, you know, none of his guys could make it to this gig and or he wanted to go see the Femmes or something. And so he was there with the gear and I was the liaison to the band, cause I'm still a guitar tech with the Femmes. So I met him, I'm setting up everything and you know, I played the show and I tear down everything, load it back up with them and he looks at me, he's like, "you're amazing man." I'm like, "why? What's up?" He's like, "I just saw you deal with all

the gear and everything and play the entire show with these guys and tear it down." and he's like, "where are you based out of?" I'm like, Milwaukee. He's like, that's great cause I'm managing Dennis DeYoung and I need somebody in that region for shows to do backline. And I'm like, great, call me up, you know? So I got that call, did a couple of gigs with Dennis and was backstage talking to him and he's just reminiscing about, you know, "I miss the 70's when, you know, real guitar players had Gibsons, Les Pauls and Marshall Stacks. And I just love that. And now they have all these boutique-y small amps and all this." And he looks at me, he goes, "you look like a rocker. I bet you have a Les Paul and a Marshall Stack" and I was like, "as a matter of fact, Dennis, that's my setup."

Bryan: No way.

Jeff: And then I proceeded to tell him the story. It's like, you know, one of the first songs I ever learned on my own that I was really proud of was Suite Madame Blue. He's like, "Oh, that's great." He's like, "you know what, there's a couple of songs that we play," and they only had one guitar player at the time. I think they have two now or he has two now. He's like, "you know what? Why don't you play rhythm guitar back by the monitor console on like four or five songs?" I'm like, "I'd be honored to."

Bryan: Oh wow

Jeff: I ended up like, Come Sail Away, Suite Madame Blue, Rockin' the Paradise, all these. And I'm back by the monitor console. You know, he's like, "you're not in the video, you're not in the pictures. Nobody knows you. So I just want you to be back by the monitors. You know, you're not a member of the band."

Jeff: I'm like, I don't care. It's fine. But every night he would come, he would run across the stage and like give me the heavy metal horns and then run back. So here I am like, this surreal moment over here, I'm playing Come Sail Away with the guy who wrote it. And Suite Madame Blue, one of the first songs I ever figured out in my entire life, you know.

Bryan: And that's why you listed as ghost rhythm guitar? Because he's hiding you back there?

Jeff: Correct. Correct.

Bryan: So What happened to Styx, what happened to the band?

Jeff: They went through a bunch of stuff that you'd have to go and research. I don't want to get into any of that. That was way before my thing.

Bryan: Yeah. So, but he's obviously able to use that music and play it.

Jeff: Yeah. Oh yeah.. And he still performs, it's mainly regionally in the Midwest area that he does I've noticed. But yeah, he still plays.

Bryan: His voice is incredible.

Jeff: Oh yeah. It's great. And then the Uriah Heep thing is kind of funny as well. So way back when I started, when I had the four track recording things, I worked at a local records store that was called Mainstream, it was the big chain here in Wisconsin, Mainstream Records. And one of the young kids that worked there, he asked me one night, "Hey, I got this song, can you record it for me?" And so he went back to my, I was living still at home at the time, and went to my bedroom that I had turned into a "recording studio," with quotation marks. And recorded his song. And I played slide guitar on this particular song that this kid had written.

Jeff: Fast forward 20 years later or something, he's the production manager for a big casino here called Potawatomi Casino that has major acts all the time like casinos do. So they booked Uriah Heep for two nights. They're gonna perform the Demons and Wizards record in its entirety for the first time, at least in the US. And he called me up, he's like, "Hey, you still play slide guitar?" And I'm like absolutely. He's like, "well cause I have an artist that needs that for a few songs for their show." I'm like, "okay, great. who is it?" He's like, "Uriah Heep ? You know who that is?" I'm like, "uh, yeah." And here's how I know I was a big fan, and still am, in the 70s and I saw Uriah Heep open up for Kiss in 1977.

Bryan: Oh my goodness.

Jeff: Which means my very first concert that I'd ever seen was Uriah Heep.

Bryan: It's like full circle man.

Jeff: It's totally bizarre. And then this kid remembered that I played slide guitar and called me and I walk in to this thing, you know, "hey, show up for rehearsal." I walk in and they're there, I get introduced. The bass player, unfortunately he passed from cancer shortly after. His name was Trevor Bolder, who happened to be the bass player of Ziggy Stardust, you know, David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust band, among other bands. And so I'm just, wow, this is crazy. Like totally surreal for me, you know. And we ended up jamming, you know, Mick, met Mick Box who's the original member. He's like, "let's jam blues in E," so we jammed for about 10 minutes and after we got done and he's like, "it looks like we got our man." and played the shows and it was great. And you know, I hung out with those guys. I told Mick that story I was like "Mick, I gotta tell you this story. So you're the first band I ever saw in my life and I'm playing with you." He's like "good on you mate."

Bryan: Were you rocking the national slide guitar?

Jeff: No, no. It's an actual electric slide.

Bryan: Oh okay, yeah

Jeff: Just standard. And yea they loved it, they had me come up on a couple more songs and played a couple dates with them and, and we're friends to this day.

Bryan: That's so bad ass.

Jeff: It's so bizarre.

Bryan: I'm looking at all these venues that you've performed at, and talk about iconic, you know. Red Rocks in Denver, Coachella main stage in Indio, Fillmore, San Francisco, The Greek. Out of all of these venues that you've been on stage, looking out at the crowd and doing what you love, which one really stands out as your favorite and why?

Jeff: Well, the Fillmore was, just because even though that wasn't the back in the day Jimi Hendrix Fillmore or whatever, it's that iconic name. And I mean all of them really. But that one for me, cause I just loved all this. I grew up in the 60s and early seventies bands and all that, you know, and you'd always hear "live at the Fillmore" and you know, "they're playing the Fillmore" and you know, so that one was a big one for me. But the Sydney opera house, obviously. And that's, you know, the Femmes, they got booked into all those places cause once again, that's kind of a bizarre side of them. They can play punk rock clubs and then go and play these iconic venues as well.

Bryan: Yeah. What about the Central Park stage, New York city?

Jeff: That was super cool. It's not the one, if you're thinking of Paul Simon. They're legendary. They have this series that they do every summer, and that was cool, but unfortunately for us we got rained out like within one or two songs.

Bryan: But just being there in Central Park, I mean New York City

Jeff: And playing, exactly, yeah.

Bryan: That's gotta be amazing.

Jeff: But what was great about that was the makeup show. We played an iconic venue that closed shortly after that, that had been around since the 70s as well. But yeah, so that was super cool. You know, the makeup show was like five months later or something in winter.

Bryan: So what do you do when you're not playing in bands and performing and recording albums?

Jeff: Extracurricular activities, my father gave me a present of scuba diving lessons. You know, shortly after that time I told you about when Femmes played there and I reconnected with him.

Bryan: Oh in Australia?

Jeff: Yeah. Yeah. So I got my certification in the great barrier reef and I love it. It's incredible. I wish I had done it 20 some years earlier, but yeah, that's what's my favorite thing.

Bryan: Right on.

Jeff: Cause you know, everything else I'm doing and I'm playing bands and whatnot, it's all consuming.

Bryan: Sounds like everything else is completely audio or music related.

Jeff: Yup. Correct. Which I love to do. It's super fun to me, you know, but if, you know, any thing like that, scuba diving hands down is my favorite activity.

Bryan: Yeah. So is your next gig with Beatallica on tour?

Jeff: Actually I have a trio of a few buddies of mine that we've been around for quite a long time, just getting together, singing songs. We're doing something this Thursday for a holiday party that we do every year. Beatallica just played Milwaukee this past Friday. I just played a show with my tribute band Then Lizzie, which is a Thin Lizzy tribute band, which is super fun. The next gig coming up is that, then I have a solo show, my first ever solo show coming up here in Milwaukee at place called the County Clare, a small Irish bar.

Bryan: Nice.

Jeff: Yeah, so, that's terrifying me, cause I'm not a singer/troubadour guy.

Bryan: You're used to be shoved behind the speakers by Dennis DeYoung.

Jeff: Exactly. I'm a great backing guy, but they called me, they keep persisting and I'm like, all right, damnit, I gotta do this. So that's the one that I'm really freaking out about, this small pub, basically. I'm more nervous about that than any other thing I've ever done.

Bryan: What are you going to play?

Jeff: I have several original songs that nobody's ever heard, and so I'm going to do that. And I decided to break it down into the different instruments. You know, I'll play a few songs on mandolin and play a few songs on guitar, et cetera. It's only like an hour, or they only want me to do like an hour or so.

Bryan: Right.

Jeff: So I'm gonna like break it down and then tell some stories, do that whole thing, you know

Bryan: You've got a lot of great stories.

Jeff: Yeah. Yeah, it's super fun. And then the big shows coming up are around May. We're playing Montreal and Moscow and some Midwest dates with Beatallica, and which I'm sure by that time there'll be more dates added to all of that stuff. So.

Bryan: Well that's super exciting. Yeah. So where can people find you online? I see hamtoneaudio.com is your website with your bio and it looks like you have some show dates on there and a good resource for people if they wanna see you in Milwaukee. Any other social media places they can go check you out?

Jeff: Yeah, I'm on Instagram, hamtoneaudio, and Facebook under my name, Jeff Hamilton. And then obviously Beatallica has their own pages and whatnot. So yeah. And I will update my site. I haven't done that actually in a while, in the beginning of summer.

Bryan: For my listeners, I recommend going to that site because there's a lot of really cool pictures of Jeff jamming out with all kinds of iconic bands and musicians and his bio is really impressive. So go check him out, Hamtoneaudio.com. And if you have a chance to see him live, it looks like there's lots of opportunities in Milwaukee, and if you want to make the trip, in Moscow and Montreal in May.

Jeff: Yeah, you know, I wanted to mention a new project that I'm involved in through me doing some production, it's called Ice Island. There's a duo in the Midwest here called Codebreaker that's fairly popular all over amongst DJs and whatnot, for like electronic music and that kind of thing, and Synthpop. And I got called by the singer to produce his new project, which is called Ice Island. And I ended up playing bass and guitar on it and that's the next thing I'm going to be involved in as well, as far as a new feather in the hat, another band. And he just put up, he's created a Spotify account. I don't know if he put up any of the music yet, but that's all in the works. But Ice Island is something to check out as well.

Bryan: Ice Island, check it out listeners. Sounds like no shortage of projects for you to be involved in

Jeff: Yeah. And this is completely left field. It's like synthesizer pop stuff, it's things I've never done, you know, but super fun.

Bryan: Very cool. Thanks a lot Jeff for being on the show.

Jeff: Thanks, Bryan. It's a blast.

Bryan: Hey, thank you for listening and I hope you enjoyed today's episode of the Dreampath Podcast. If so, I have a favor to ask. Can you go to your favorite podcast service and give me a rating and review? Your feedback is what keeps this podcast going. I appreciate your time and as always, go find your dream path.