Susan Voelz

LONG BIOGRAPHY

"Sounding like Nico and John Cale fused into one (somewhat sweeter) being" (Musician Magazine), Susan Voelz (rhymes with 'bells') has pioneered the violin in rock as a long time contributing member of Poi dog Pondering, punk poet Alejandro Escovedo, British rock legend Ronnie Lane and John Mellencamp.

"One minute her violin sounds like the sweet voice of angels, and the next minute it is a twisted cacophony inspired by demons," (Deadboy blog) or as one Chicago radio host described it: "a bat with butterfly wings."

A staple in Steve Albini's studio and also John McIntyre's Soma, her violin and arrangements can be heard on many recordings.

As an artist, she creates "powerfully atmospheric music" (Trowser Press), playing through guitar effects and triggering samples from sources as varied as the opera Madame Butterfly, the Velvet Underground or from her own three records. She often collaborates with video artist Marco Ferrari.

I was raised in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin - the name is Menomonee for "little firefly"; you can find this in Longfellow's poem "Hiawatha's Childhood" - born into a family of French/Irish and German/Russian ancestry, big band jazz records, symphonies and operas. (Think Stan Getz's "Girl from Ipanema", the Tommy Dorsey horn section, and Puccini's Madame Butterfly). When I was nine years old my grandfather's violin appeared from somewhere up in the attic. (I later had it converted to a five -string and still play it today). The Christmas Band was formed: my dad on jazz bass, my mom playing the pump organ, my brother transposing the trumpet, me on violin, my grandmother humming, later there were nieces on jingle bells. We were cheerful and awful.

Summer camp: The coolest thing was hearing a Buffalo Springfield record for the first time, consoling a 15-year-old Baptist violinist who was conflicted because she couldn't go to the dance, and seeing the Northern Lights over the lake.

High school: Discovered the song "White Bird" (by the band It's a Beautiful Day, with violin as a rock instrument), wearing go-go boots, a short white skirt and red sparkly top while marching in the Pasadena Rose Bowl Parade, twirling fire baton at high school football games, buying a beat up Stella guitar for $25.

Higher Education: Double major (Violin and English) from renowned music school Indiana University - Bloomington. Fell in love with a songwriter who wanted me to play in his band. Still managed to graduate.

Gypsy Life #1: He and I moved to California and lived on Christmas Tree Lane in Alta Dena up next to the mountains. Worked at RCA Records by day. Boyfriend died. Back to Bloomington (recovery) and on to New Orleans (recorded songs on an X-15 Fostex tape recorder at night).

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Moved to "Slacker" era Austin: Met and played with Alejandro Escovedo and British Rock Legend Ronnie Lane (Small Faces/Faces) in a brief and glorious outfit called the Seven Samurai. The night of the first show, met members of the traveling Hawaiian band Poi dog Pondering who asked me to play some fiddle on their debut record.

Gypsy Life #2: Touring the U.S., Europe and Japan with Poi dog, all the while writing in a journal to sort out the unpredictable moods, ridiculous hours, extreme alcohol intake, and the love-hate social unit within the van or bus. John Mellencamp called about now to have me play in support of his Big Daddy record.

TV appearances with various bands include "Saturday Night Live," "Late Show with David Letterman," "The Tonight Show," "Late Night with Conan O'Brien," "Austin City Limits," and "The Today Show."

Recorded Solo Records: *13 Ribs, Summer Crashing,* and *Trust the Waves Will Hold You* were well reviewed in major press including Rolling Stone, Musician Magazine and Trouser Press.

Alejandro Escovedo: Much touring of the U.S., Canada, UK, France. Impressive stages: Carnegie Hall, Austin City Limits Festival, TransMusicale Festival (Renne, France), the Democratic National Convention. Tour Highlight: Hearing Tammy Wynette sing "Stand by Your Man" in Nashville the night Conway Twitty died.

Charlie Sexton Sextet Tour Highlight: Seeing a grizzly bear on its haunches out the bus window one morning near Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Theatre: Cast in Frank McCourt's long running "The Irish & How They Got that Way" and "The Devil's Sonata" a play about Giuseppe Tartini's dreamed violin sonata. Robert Cornelius auditioning advice: "Just show them who you are."

Composing: Peabody Award winning Frontline "Children of Conyers County" and its follow up "Merchants of Cool" which Rolling Stone called "well, kinda cool." "In My Room," "Prince in the Projects," and two long-running PBS educational documentaries "Getting your GED," "Workplace Essential Skills."

In the studio: Played on many recordings with producers Steve Albini (Nirvana In Utero), John Cale (of the Velvet Underground), Joe Boyd (Nick Drake), John McIntyre (Tortoise), Tony Visconti (David Bowie). Recorded for theatre sound designs, some short films including arranging and recording music for the 2006 Oscar for Best Documentary Short Subject, "A Note of Triumph: The Golden Age of Norman Corwin" and improvising music for the Jonathan Demme movie "Jimmy Carter: A Man from the Plains".

Poi dog Pondering: Seven studio albums to date. Worldwide touring, (Roskilde, Montreaux Jazz Festival, Lollapalooza, Red Rocks, Ravinia). Symphonic collaborations: "Poi in the Park" with the Grant Park Symphony, "Fantasy and Remix of Themes for Dvorak's New World Symphony" and "Carmen Re-Mixed" performed with the Chicago Sinfonietta at Orchestra Hall. Sound track: composition and live performance for the 1932 Brazilian silent film "Limite" at Sonotech in Chicago.

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Author: *The Musicians Guide to the Road: An All Access Backstage Pass to Touring* published by Billboard/ Random House in December 2007. (See Gypsy Life #2 for source material).

Recent string performances include playing with Wilco and the Breeders and recording with Kim Deal, Mono of Japan, Counting Crows, Smoking Popes and Ezra Furman.

Current SMV Recording: 2022 *Trust the Waves Will Hold You* and the 2025 *Arrival of the Ancestors*.

Current SMV Performance: Influenced by the ballads of the Big Band Era, avant-garde artist Laurie Anderson, the return of her childhood piano, the show is awash with strings played through guitar effects, samples and spoken word.

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