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## Bee Spears Holding Down The Low End For Willie Nelson



Most Bass players work hard in hopes that one day they can do a tour with a major artist. Bassist Bee Spears has made a career out of doing what most of us only dream of! For the past thirty-six years, Bee has held down the low end for the one and only Willie Nelson. We recently had the chance to chat with Bee.

**EPI:** Hey Bee, what's going on with you these days?

**BEE:** Well, Willie had a bout with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, but that's all great now so we're back touring full blast. We also just finished recording a new album that should be out in the spring.

**EPI:** So how did you get into this business anyway?

**BEE:** A guy named Terry Yarborough and I started playing music together when we were juniors in high-school. He got a guitar and I got a little Silvertone bass from Sears that I had to buy on time. We started practicing and ended up winning some talent contests. Then I got a job with a local band in San Antonio. Their bass player, a guy named David Gessner had gone to work for Willie so they hired me. Then in 1968 David got drafted for the Vietnam War. I was just kind of hanging out at the time and Willie's guitar player Jimmy Day said why don't we hire Bee? He doesn't play very good but he learns real fast and we can teach him what we want him to play. (Laughs) So they hired me and I've been on the road since. That was 36 years ago.

**EPI:** Are you a self taught bassist?

**BEE:** Yes, basically I am self taught. My dad was a fiddle player so he taught me a little bit but I learned a lot by listening to records, like Ray Price records. Then I discovered “Junior” Husky at an early age. Most guys then just idolized him and I listened to everything I could get my hands on that he played on. I’ve also learned a lot from other players. Willie taught me a lot about bass. Jimmy Day helped out a lot. You know, back in those days you had mentors that would sit down with you and show you stuff compared to these days when you put a tape or CD in and learn how to play. You had people sitting there telling you things like, “that’s cool but it doesn’t go with every damn thing you play”. (Laughs) I think it’s better when you can learn from an old pro.

**EPI:** It must be great playing with a legend like Willie Nelson! Tell me one of your fondest memories of playing with Willie.

**BEE:** Oh gosh, there are several of them but I guess the times that we worked with Ray Charles have to stand out. We worked with him several times through the years and every time was just great. I especially remember one time when I kind of stood back and watched Willie while he was watching Ray sing one of his songs. It was very touching, very moving. But honestly just playing with Willie has been special. I was always struck by Willie as a lot of people are. Just last night we were in Alexandria Louisiana. We walked out to a sold-out house and people were just absolutely excited to see Will.

**EPI:** As great as it is, thirty six years is a long time to be on the road. Do you ever get tired of it?


**BEE:** Well, the hard part of course is missing your family. I was gone a lot when my kids grew up and that’s the worst part. Of course at this point I’ve got to see the end of this movie! (Laughs) I’ve thought about getting off the road but at this point, I think I would regret it if I did.

**EPI:** Does the family atmosphere that Willie always talks about really exist between the band members?

**BEE:** Absolutely! You know, the newest guy in the band has been with us twenty-something years so we’ve gone through a lot together. It’s just like any other family. We’re there for the good times and the rough times. It’s a good support group and we look after each other.

**EPI:** We are honored that you are playing Epiphone product. How did you get hooked up with Epi?

**BEE:** A friend of mine and I were talking a few years back. I had been looking



around for a new bass. We got this thing happening to all us old guys where we are starting to have disc problems in our necks. I guess it comes from the old days of hanging a twenty-five pound Alembic around your neck... back when we used to do four-and-a-half hour sets. Anyway, I told him I needed to get another axe that sounded good but was lighter. He recommended that I check out the Epiphone line so I did and it's been a real blessing. I have a [Jack Casady](#) which I really like to use when I need kind of an upright sound. I have an acoustic [El Capitan](#) which I used on our instrumental record "Night and Day". It sounded fantastic! And right now I'm playing a [Vinnie Les Paul Standard Bass](#) which is incredible! It's probably the easiest playing bass that I've ever played. It's just a fantastic bass. I used it on this last record and it sounds really good. I'm using it live as well. We go to all these different venues and it can really be a nightmare from one night to the next with all the big, boomy auditoriums. I've found the Vinnie to be very versatile and it works in a lot of different situations. I am very pleased with it.

I would encourage anybody looking for a good, solid instrument to check out Epiphone. You're not going to beat them. You go in music stores today and see all these guitars that are three, four, five and even six thousand dollars! You're not going to find any better than what Epiphone has to offer and at prices musicians can afford. I really appreciate that about them.



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