



Will McFarlane

Will McFarlane spent six years playing guitar with Bonnie Raitt, from 1974 to 1980. Born on a Navy base in California, McFarlane started voice lessons at age 6, adding piano a year later. Seeing the Beatles play the Ed Sullivan Show when he was 12 inspired McFarlane to take up guitar. He developed a taste for R&B in high school, focusing on Motown material while developing as a rhythm guitarist.

McFarlane attended college in Denver, but soon dropped out and had been playing gigs in bars and clubs across the country when Raitt found him in a club in Cambridge, Mass.

McFarlane learned how to listen as well as play while in Raitt's band. His musical education was a versatile one, encompassing straight blues, country blues, folk, country, rock 'n' roll, as well as singer-songwriter material. Raitt was sharing stages with living blues legends, and McFarlane soaked up as much as he could from them before and after the gigs.

McFarlane left Raitt to move to Muscle Shoals, Alabama, playing on records for Bobby Blue Bland, Little Milton, Etta James and Johnnie Taylor as part of the famed Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section.

He parted company amicably from Raitt in 1980, because he and his wife, Janet, wanted a change of lifestyle and didn't want to raise two kids in L.A.

Soon after relocating to Muscle Shoals, he had a spiritual awakening. His younger brother was murdered while McFarlane was still with Raitt, and he says he stayed high for three years afterward trying to deal with it.

He became a Christian, but continued to make his living playing secular music at Muscle Shoals Sound, as well as traveling in ministry. During this time his floundering marriage was restored, and he and Janet, now married 31 years, also travel together.

McFarlane has continued to work in secular and gospel music, both traditional and contemporary styles. He has added full-fledged minister to his list of occupations since coming to the Triangle area seven years ago, and has been one of the pastors at Grace Church in Chapel Hill. He has continued to work in Muscle Shoals, Nashville, and other places around the country and world, as well as doing many sessions and live performances in the Raleigh/Durham area.