

Medicine Ball

Jan King gets it done. Whether it's flying in the face of a dismissive boyfriend or acquaintance who didn't take seriously her determination to become the crackerjack guitar player she is – she put that same determination to work to become an expert auto mechanic inspired by the same kind of derisive dismissal – or to change the world by teaching guitar and *attitude* to children, many of them economically and otherwise challenged or disadvantaged, in and around the Chicago area. She has all kinds of students but, also a former board member for Girls Rock! Chicago, she takes a special pride in the ones with the biggest obstacles to overcome, particularly when one of those obstacles is being a female in the male-dominated world of guitar playing, an attitude that, with so much evidence to dispute it, would be ridiculously outdated even if was ever the least bit valid at all.

Jan had already been in a band or two as a singer before she even learned to play guitar. Wanting more control over her music she put her fingers to the grindstone and made herself into a damn fine player; an exceptional one, boyfriends and roommates often finding her fast asleep with the guitar still plugged in and strapped on after hours of practice. That's probably one of the things that drew drummer Tami Peden and bassman Keith Wakefield to form a new version of her band Medicine Ball. Tami's first band gig in fact was with Jan in Puss 'N Boots.

I met Jan back in 1986. I was hanging out in San Francisco with my friend Lynn and her friend Gene who was an Orchids (an earlier band of Jan's) fan. One day we got a wild hair up our asses to drive down to L.A. because he knew this Jan King woman who was starting a band called Puss 'N' Boots and he really wanted to meet her. We ended up hanging out with her and Steve Hunter at their apartment. I was pretty shy at the time but I'm sure we hung out and talked about music. About 6 months later my friend Lynn and I moved to L.A. to attend Musicians Institute and we hooked up with Jan again (There's a rum soaked all-nighter in there that I'll save for another time). Lynn and I were roommates and at some point and during the summer of 1987 Jan called us up because her bass player had just bailed out. She had her big first P'N'B gig coming up soon and wanted to know if we knew any blond female bass players. Lynn (not blond but a guitar player) was out of town but I told Jan even though I was a drummer I played a little bass if she wanted to give me a shot. I played bass with P'N'B for about 3 or

4 months until our drummer quit and now nearly 23 years later the rest is history. I've played with Jan in various bands including Crying Blue Sky, Fetish, Medicine Ball, Cane Corso and Shrieking Violet. Puss 'N' Boots and Crying Blue Sky played the LA scene and recorded extensively from 1987 to 1994. Crying Blue Sky had a brief stint in Minneapolis before moving to Chicago in 1995. I toured Europe in 2003 with Wanda Chrome and the Leather Pharaohs and played around the Chicago area over the years with Unibrow, Sugar Spin and Lethal Poetry. My God is Jimi Hendrix and my drummer influences are Phil Rudd, Neil Peart, Mitch Mitchell, Ginger Baker, Matt Cameron to name just a few. I also teach drums to little (and big) up and coming rockers.

Wakefield, originally a sax player, has a background in Jazz but became a bass player (“I worship at the church of Jaco Pastorius”) drawn to rock and funk through the influence of Bootsy Collins, John Paul Jones, Victor Wooten, & Stanley Clarke.

I met Jan and Tami while I was playing bass in a band called Salamander Red. I'm going to guess it was early 1998, but it could have been 1997. Tami would probably remember better. They were in a band called Fetish at the time. We were sharing a gig at a total dive in the "Wicker Park" neighborhood of Chicago called "Big Horse". Sadly "Big Horse" does not exist anymore.

Not long after that, Salamander Red broke up and Fetish had renamed itself Medicine Ball. The Fetish bass player had to leave town for family reasons. So Tami contacted me to let me know that they were looking for a new bass player. I agreed to do it, I think for a limited time because I already had other projects that I was working on and I didn't think I could commit for the long haul. After a year and a half, I moved on to concentrate on jazz and jazz fusion. But instead I got married and started a family!

I had always felt bad about not sticking with Medicine ball. So when they approached me about rejoining, I signed on.

As for Jan King, her life story reads like a creation of Dorothy Parker, Charles Dickens, and William S. Burroughs. That'll be for the book. Professionally she has enough résumé for someone twice her age. Originally from Austin, Minnesota (“Just like Austin, Texas only on the other end of **I-35**) she wrote and sang the

featured track “Chains” (later covered by Soul Asylum among others) on the influential compilation album, Big Hits of Mid-America, Volume III, from Minneapolis label, Twin Tone Records.

Relocating to L.A. she recorded a self-titled album on MCA with the Orchids, Kim Fowley's follow-up to the Runaways. Later she fronted her own bands and worked as a solo artist, and contributing, to many other artists' projects. It was around this time she met and sang for country/folk/rock singer/songwriter and bon vivant Phil Lee. With whom she toured in 2009. She's also done film music and scoring with one-time partner, Steve Hunter and she performed the song “Fading Away” for the movie, Pet Sematary II.

In 1988 she formed, fronted and played guitar for Puss n' Boots, an all-girl band which morphed into the band Crying Blue Sky. In late 1995 she moved to Chicago, forming a new band, Medicine Ball and recording their CD, Super Karmic Sweepstakes Winner, for HTS Recordings out of Little Rock. In 2000, she and Tami formed Cane Corso with Chicago native, Steve Gerlach, and recorded their CD, Loud At Any Volume. In 2005 Cane Corso gave way to Shrieking Violet-also with Tami – but with Keith now available in 2009, she realized that her heart lay with the bluesy, heavy textured rock and roll that characterized Medicine Ball and the next phase of that band was underway.

Jan King is a combination of Jimi Hendrix, Tallulah Bankhead, Mother Maybelle Carter, Henry Stanley and Amelia Earhart and with Tami and Keith in Medicine Ball she- and they- will rock you with a rumble that starts at the top of your skull rumbles down through your chest and gut and through the very best parts of you. Oh, and they'll make you shake your ass too. – Rick Allen; February 27, 2010