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Barrington masseuse has toured with music superstars



Darcy Lynch (right) with Michael McDonald.

BARRINGTON - There are masseuses who play Santana in their waiting rooms. And then there are masseuses like Darcy Lynch who actually massage Santana. Ms. Lynch, 43, a fitness instructor at the Bayside YMCA, has also worked knots from the backs of musicians and crew from bands like Crosby, Stills and Nash, Lynard Skynard, Angels and Airwaves and Taking Bank Sunday as co-founder of Stage Hands, a performance industry massage therapy company. And in the next few weeks, she will be touring with Megadeath to six venues as their personal masseuse.

"It's not a normal group of people to be hanging out with," she said of her unusual niche, but once those famous rock stars get face down on that table, "it could be anybody."

A native Californian who now lives in Riverside with her husband, Mark, and 10-year-old daughter Hannah, Ms. Lynch's profile hardly fits the description of someone who rubs shoulders with (and of) music's biggest names.

After graduating from the University of Colorado at Boulder with a degree in journalism (she later earned a masters degree in educational technology), she spent 15 years as a video producer prior to moving to Rhode Island. Seeking a career change three years ago, she enrolled in an accredited massage program at Rhode Island Community College, where she learned techniques such as Shiatsu and Reiki and earned her degree this past June.

During her time at CCRI, Ms. Lynch caught her big break when old friend and professional bass player George Hawkins Jr. invited her to ply her trade for his current touring band headed by John Fogerty.

That opportunity was the first in a series of big-name gigs for Ms. Lynch in the following months.

"Everybody I massaged kept referring me," she explained. "The music community is very small."

The result was the founding of Stage Hands, which Ms. Lynch and partner Patrick Ryan of Barrington started earlier this year after Mr. Ryan suggested that her skills would transfer well to the often back-breaking working environment of the performance industry.

"[Rock stars] are like athletes," Ms. Lynch said. "They get a lot of injuries — they lead hard lives on the road."

In most cases, she simply set up her booth backstage, setting aside time for the musicians themselves but also giving 10- to 15-minute sessions to crew who stopped by. The work could get intense — she said she once gave seven straight deep tissue massages to musicians and crew of Bonnie Raitt's band and woke the next morning with hand cramps that made her look like a "pterodactyl."

In addition to being able to withstand some punishment, Ms. Lynch was also helped by her background, as the daughter of 60s musician Ron Lynch of The Cascades.

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"I'm not star-struck," she said. "I've been around bands my whole life."

Ms. Lynch explained that part of her appeal to her famous clients is her ability to take things in stride — "they don't want people who will get in their face ... I treat everybody the same."

She also said that her own unique approach to her craft had her clients coming back for more.

"They love my energy ... and I think with massage, this is really one of those things you can't quantify because everyone's touch is different," she said. "When I massage, I think I'm really positive, and I think they feel that ... I'm not just moving through the massage just to get through it."

A who's who of rock

As Ms. Lynch's client list reads like a set list from Farm Aid, she said she has no shortage of "Behind the Music" stories that make musicians rock stars.

Gary Rossington, founding member and still lead guitarist of Lynard Skynard, for example, allegedly wasn't shy about discussing the toll his rock lifestyle had taken on his frame. Pointing out broken bones and surgery scars, many of which stemmed from his injuries suffered in the 1977 plane crash that killed three of his bandmates, Mr. Rossington concluded by exclaiming to Ms. Lynch in his southern drawl, "And I just thank the good Lord I'm alive and can still rock!"

A month later, Ms. Lynch remembered watching him on television as he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

"It was exciting to see him there, after that little interaction we had," she said.

On another occasion, Ms. Lynch was embarrassed to learn that the small man she had asked, "and you are?" was rhythm and blues artist Michael McDonald. Despite the embarrassing moment, Ms. Lynch reported Mr. McDonald took the slight in stride and even invited her to dinner that night — "he was just a really humble guy," she said.

An especially memorable moment, she added, didn't even involve a rock star, but a rock star's son. On tour with Neil Young, Ms. Lynch said she massaged the musician's son, who had cerebral palsy. The family appreciated her work so much, they invited her to stay on tour with them in New York to continue working on Mr. Young's son.

"That was a cool moment," she said. "Most people are afraid to touch people like that — they're deprived of that touch, and that's what they suffer the most from."

Most of the time, however, Ms. Lynch said the world she encountered backstage differed little from most people's perceptions.

"They're definitely prima donnas," she said of her more famous clients. "They're certainly not shy — they have no modesty really. They're on the stage all the time, so it's not a big deal for them to say what they want and do what they want."

Ms. Lynch said she was most surprised by some of the stars inability to do things for themselves — "they lead insulated lives," she said. "They're very high maintenance."

Despite the challenges, however, she said she has enjoyed her experience.

"I'm a rocker — it's a really good vibe and really fun," she said. "I enjoy that whole atmosphere. I've been around them so much, I've just gotten used to them."

A new direction

Though Ms. Lynch said she will continue to pursue Stage Hands, she also is starting another massage practice, Waves of Healing, that will cater to those in the East Bay area who may not have platinum selling albums.

Offering a number of massage techniques, including myofascial touch massage, sports massage and hot stone massage therapy, as well as pilates and personal training, Mr. Lynch hoped she could reach out to a different clientele in need of the same personal touch.

Though she often cooperates with local businesses that have her come and do on-site sessions, Ms. Lynch said she also has a growing list of clients that will come to her Riverside studio, and for special cases she will make

visits to clients' homes.

Just two weeks ago, for instance, she worked on a 22-year-old Smith College student who had recently suffered a stroke and is just now emerging from her comatose state. Using a combination of light massage, Reiki massage and other techniques, Ms. Lynch said she could see signs of the girl's awareness of her touch.

Currently, Ms. Lynch said her weekly schedule usually includes 20 hours devoted to Stage Hands and 20 to Waves of Healing, but she hoped her time would tilt more towards the latter in the future. For now, however, the rock scene is her biggest business.

"It's very interesting that this happened," she said.

Star-studded list of clients

With her company, Stage Hands (www.stagehandsmassage.com), Bayside YMCA masseuse Darcy Lynch has had several famous clients. Anyone interested can request a session through her local company, Waves of Healing, at 369-2239. Below is a list of some of the musicians she's worked on.

- * Neil Young
- * Mic Fleetwood
- * Willie Nelson
- * Lynard Skynard
- * Brian Setzer
- * Bonnie Rait
- * Angels and Airwaves
- * Taking Back Sunday
- * Crosby, Stills and Nash
- * Keb Mo
- * Rascal Flatts
- * John Fogerty
- * Michael McDonald
- * Santana
- * Megadeath

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