

Meet Duke Levine, the Mass. ‘maestro’ on tour with Bonnie Raitt

By **Stuart Munro** Globe Correspondent, Updated August 28, 2025, 9:00 a.m.



Boston guitarist Duke Levine performs with Bonnie Raitt at Tanglewood this Sunday. DUKE LEVINE

Folks making the trek to Tanglewood [this Sunday](#) for Bonnie Raitt’s performance will enjoy the bonus of seeing world-class guitarist Duke Levine, long a [mainstay](#) of the local roots music community. His lengthy session discography includes everyone from Ellis Paul, Deb Pasternak, and many other members of the 1990s Boston-Cambridge singer-songwriter scene, to folks like Dick Curless, Solas, and Lee Ann Womack.

Levine joined Raitt’s touring band in 2022, and has been out with her every year since. Before the [gig with Raitt](#) came along, he had toured with Mary Chapin Carpenter, [Peter Wolf](#), and others. Wolf, with whom Levine has an ongoing tenure spanning a couple of decades, calls him “the maestro.”

“Some guitarists have chops,” Wolf observed during a brief phone call, “but Duke, in my opinion, seems to have it all, not only the technical ability but a tremendous amount of taste. I think of him as beyond a sideman, he is so gifted and adds so much.”

After returning from the European leg of Raitt’s current tour, the Globe caught up with Levine from his Malden home via video call to talk about landing his spot in Raitt’s band, his diverse résumé, and his first-ever bands.

Q. How did you originally make the connection with Bonnie? Did she recruit you, or what were the circumstances?

A. I’ve met her over the years, just briefly here and there. But I didn’t really know her. When she was looking for somebody, her bass player, Hutch Hutchinson, whom I’ve known for a long time, and a couple of guitar players she really trusted recommended me for the gig. Rick Holmstrom, who plays with Mavis Staples and who I’ve gotten to be friends with over the last bunch of years, also vouched for me.

Q. Did you audition or play for her beforehand?

A. No, there was no audition. I like to say that I’ve never gotten a gig that I auditioned for. All of the gigs that have turned out to be either long-term or really nice things, I’ve just been hired for. I don’t know if it’s a coincidence or not. I could easily get fired from any of those things [laughs]. So, I try to be realistic. I think Bonnie felt confident when she hired me, but you know, anything can happen when you haven’t played with someone. So I always try to manage expectations.

Q. You’ve had long-term gigs with other artists prior to Raitt. How do they compare to this experience?

A. At this point there are two others I’ve done long-term. I played with Mary Chapin Carpenter for, I don’t know, eight years, and Peter Wolf now probably [for] 20 years.

Each of them has their own thing, but I would say that they're all not only supremely talented musicians, but also great leaders.

I feel that with people who are talented in many areas as musicians, sometimes certain things get overlooked because they're so good at one thing. Wolf is obviously an amazing frontman, but I think he's underrated as a singer—he's a great rock-and-roll singer. Mary Chapin [is a] beautiful singer and amazing songwriter, but also a really sublime acoustic guitar player. Bonnie . . . she'll tell you that she doesn't write much, but when she does, they're corkers.

Q. One thing that's noteworthy to me is that you obviously spend a fair amount of time working out of town, but when you're back, it's not too difficult to go out and see you playing in a local club.

A. Most musicians I know always want to play gigs, especially when you're used to being out on the road, playing bigger places. I think it's just in our nature. Also, you welcome an opportunity to play some different music after you've been playing a lot of the same stuff for a couple months. There's something beautiful about that, the challenge of making it fresh and keeping it vital every night, but it's also really fun to just come back and do your own thing.

Q. You've been doing this for pretty much all your adult life. When did you realize or decide that this was something that you were going to do as your vocation?

A. I was asked to join a band after I graduated high school in Worcester. It was a full-time band, sometimes working seven gigs a week. I don't even know if I made a conscious decision, but it's like, "alright, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to try to make a living at it."

After that band ended, I played a bit around town before going to New England Conservatory. I had a country band for a while called the New Rex Trailers [named after

longtime Boston country singer, cowboy, and TV personality Rex Trailer]. We played every Saturday at a bar in West Boylston called the New Rex Lounge.

Q. That's a great band name.

A. It was, until we got a cease-and-desist order from old Rex's lawyers.

BONNIE RAITT

With Jimmie Vaughan & The Tilt-A-Whirl Band. At Tanglewood, 297 W St., Lenox, Mass., Sunday, Aug. 31, 7 p.m. Tickets: \$39. [bso.org](https://www.bso.org)

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