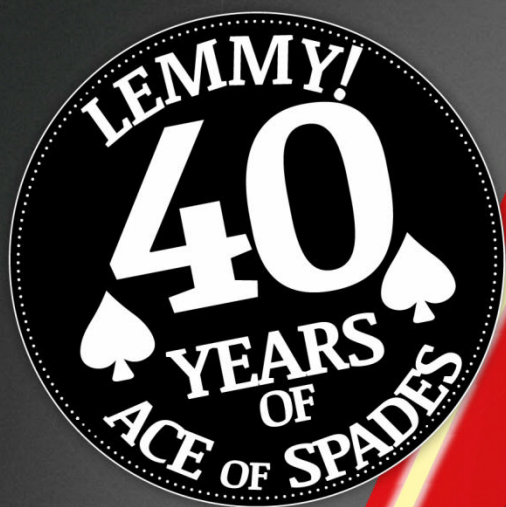


**FENDER JAZZ AT 60**  
IS THIS J REALLY WORTH \$2200?

**YAMAHA SILENT BASS**  
CAN WE ASSEMBLE IT IN 30 SECONDS?

# bass player



"Slap bass in AC/DC?  
They would have slapped *me!*"

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of bass  
advice

**ADAM  
BLACKSTONE**

Inside the  
Super Bowl

**NORBERT  
PUTNAM**

"Elvis never  
touched  
drugs."

Cliff  
Williams

**Georgia  
South**  
Nova Twins

**Damian  
Erskine**  
Back to  
school!

**Guy Pratt**  
Pink Floyd

FUTURE





INTRODUCING THE  
**CLIFF WILLIAMS**  
*StingRayBass*

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The American Professional II Series: Played by more artists on more stages. Night after night.



# WELCOME



## How do you keep your bass playing sounding fresh after 40 years?

**W**e asked that very question of AC/DC bassist Cliff Williams, back as our cover star this month after far too many years away. In Cliff's case, of course, he's been playing bass for far longer than the four decades in which he's held down the low end with everyone's favorite stadium-rockers. With the wisdom of that much experience, we can only benefit from his conclusions about style, techniques, note choices, hand injuries... and the small matter of being in a band that has been through chaos over the last few years. Enjoy our frank interview with him: We certainly did.

If you think 1980 is a long time ago, then check out our interview with Norbert Putnam, the great Nashville producer and session bassist who worked with Elvis Presley from 1970, just seven years before the King died. It's a snapshot of a time in history that is long, long gone, but Mr Putnam brings it vividly back to life.

All of low-end life is here in this issue of *Bass Player*, as it is every month, so say hello to Super Bowl musical director and Shakira bassist Adam Blackstone; Nova Twins' tone monster Georgia South; and two supremely creative solo musicians, Damian Erskine and Bonnie Whitmore. David Ellefson of Megadeth cherry-picks highlights from his career, we salute the late Lemmy, and we meet four great new bassists in our Introducing section.

New basses from Fender, Yamaha, Jackson, and Squier undergo our road-tests, and our state-of-the-art tutors continue their mission of making you the best bassist you can be. Dive in, and I'll see you next month!

**Joel McIver, Editor**



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Photos: Getty Images, Bobby P., Jay Simon Photography, Granada







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# THE Lowdown

News and views from the bass world, collated by BP's team of newshounds

## THREE'S A CHARM

Sir Paul McCartney returns with his third self-titled album

**D**ue for release shortly after this issue of BP goes on sale, *McCartney III* comes 50 years after the release of the then newly-solo bassist's first album, and a mere 40 after his second. As planned as this neat timeline might seem to be, the rockin' knight's third self-titled collection came about quite by accident, he says.

"I was living lockdown life on my farm with my family, and I would go to my studio every day," he explains. "I had to do a little bit of work on some film music and that turned into the opening track, and then when it was done I thought, what will I do next?"

"I had some stuff I'd worked on over the years, but sometimes time would run out and it would be left half-finished, so I started thinking about what I had. Each day I'd start recording with the instrument I wrote the song on, and then gradually layer it all up, it was a lot of fun. It was about making music for yourself rather than making music that has to do a job. So, I just did stuff I fancied doing. I had no idea this would end up as an album."

As with *I* and *II*, on which Macca wrote all the songs and played all the instruments himself, *III* is an entirely self-created effort. The vintage gear includes the ultimate rock'n'roll artefact from our point of view—the double bass owned by the late Bill Black of the original trio led by the equally late Elvis Presley—as well as the expected Hofner violin bass and a Mellotron from Abbey Road Studios.

***McCartney III* will be released on December 11 on Capitol Records.**



**"This album is about making music for yourself, not music that has to do a job."**

Photo: Mary McCartney MPI Communications

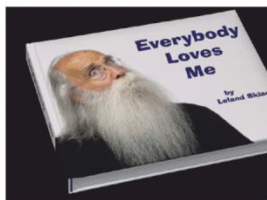






## Finger Style

Lee Sklar is booked up.



The great stage and session bassist Lee Sklar has a book out with a difference, in that it features no fewer than 6000 pictures of people flipping their middle finger at, with and near him—a bit of a change from the usual earnest autobiography. The tome, titled *Everybody Loves Me*, bears witness to Sklar's long and never-predictable career, which is said to encompass around 26,000 album recordings. Celebs alongside whom the mighty Sklar has plucked the bass appear in the book, along with a ton of Hollywood types, Gwyneth Paltrow, Jack Nicholson, Bonnie Raitt, Katey Sagal, and others among them. Get one from the awesomely-URL'ed website [www.lelandsklarsbeard.com](http://www.lelandsklarsbeard.com).



## Great Scott!

Devine intervention.

Players Path is a new, performance-based learning platform from Scott's Bass Lessons, the popular bass school led by our buddy Scott Devine. Online since May 2020, this past November the platform underwent a series of improvements, with 18 new songs and a bunch of new tracks to play along with. Loops can be created with a proprietary player, and notation-only sheet music is available for those seeking a tab-free experience. There are nine levels to complete, so what better time to get started than now? [www.scottsbasslessons.com](http://www.scottsbasslessons.com)

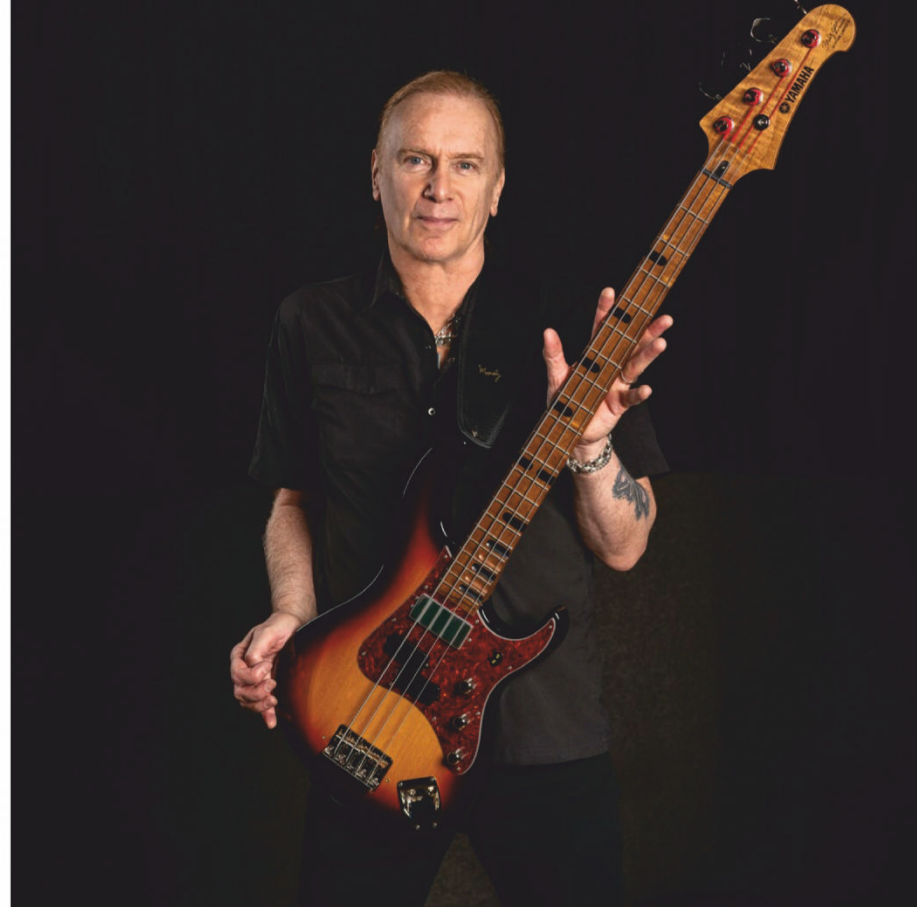


## Danelectro shorts out

The new Danelectro '59DC short-scale electric bass is said by its makers to "slot comfortably in an area often regarded as a 'half-way-house' between electric guitar and conventional full-scale bass guitar". With this in mind, we're looking forward to road-testing the venerable luthiers' new semi-hollow, double-cutaway, shorthorn instrument, as we're big fans of its long-horned older sibling. Two lipstick pickups provide the thump, while a three-way pup selector and stacked tone controls give you a range of sounds. The expected coke-bottle headstock, smooth-gearred tuners fully adjustable bridge and a two-octave neck add to the fun. We'll review it when we have one.

## Dark matters

Amp-makers Darkglass have announced two brand-new variants for their widely-acclaimed Microtubes and Alpha-Omega bass amp heads. Both of the new models feature an all-new high-efficiency class D power amp module which enables the use of speaker cabs with impedance of 2 Ohms, and a new internal cabinet simulation option: This uses an improved version of Darkglass's Cab Sim/IR module. Three slots are designed for high-resolution impulse responses. These are active in the case of the headphones out and balanced XLR DI out, and complement a studio-grade one-knob VCA compressor and a new, ultra-quiet six-band graphic EQ.



# BILLY SHEEHAN ATTITUDE BASS HITS 30

The legendary Yamaha design gets a reboot for its fourth decade

If you ever get the chance to play Billy Sheehan's signature bass, the Attitude, we suggest you take it: It's quite an experience. The scalloped frets and dual output make it a unique instrument in a field of activity where most instruments adhere to one or two prescribed templates, and it's perfectly designed to suit his ferocious style with Talas, Steve Vai, David Lee Roth, Mr. Big, Niacin, Sons Of Apollo and the Winery Dogs.

A new Attitude has recently been announced to celebrate Sheehan's 30-year collaboration with Yamaha on this bass, although he and the company actually go back as far as 1984. The Attitude 30 takes its inspiration from his original, customized bass, and as the great man says: "After all the joys of playing the Attitude bass for three decades and over a thousand shows around the world, I'm so

pleased to see the release of the Attitude 30th Anniversary edition—to pay tribute to its roots, and pave the way to the future for myself and the hundreds of Attitude players around the world."

Built in Japan, the new version comes with a sunburst finish,

a multi-ply tortoise pickguard and nickel-plated hardware, a vintage-tinted maple neck with a high-register

**"I'm pleased to pave the way to the future for hundreds of Attitude players around the world"**

scalloped fingerboard, DiMarzio Woofer and DiMarzio Will Power split pickups, and dual outputs. Available as a limited run of 30, the bass comes with a numbered certificate of authenticity signed by Sheehan, as well as a signed second pickguard.

More info about the new Yamaha Attitude bass, which comes with a wallet-straining MSRP of \$7,000, is at: <https://Yamaha.io/Attitude30thLimitedEdition>.



# Introducing

A posse of new bass players answer this month's burning questions. Do you agree with their replies?

## TOP BASS TIP

**Issy** Bass won't sound right unless you're in tune with the groove.

**Joe** Never stop trying to explore your own style.

**Louis** Click with the drummer and sit in that groove.

**Zander** Play your part and support the lead instruments and vocals.

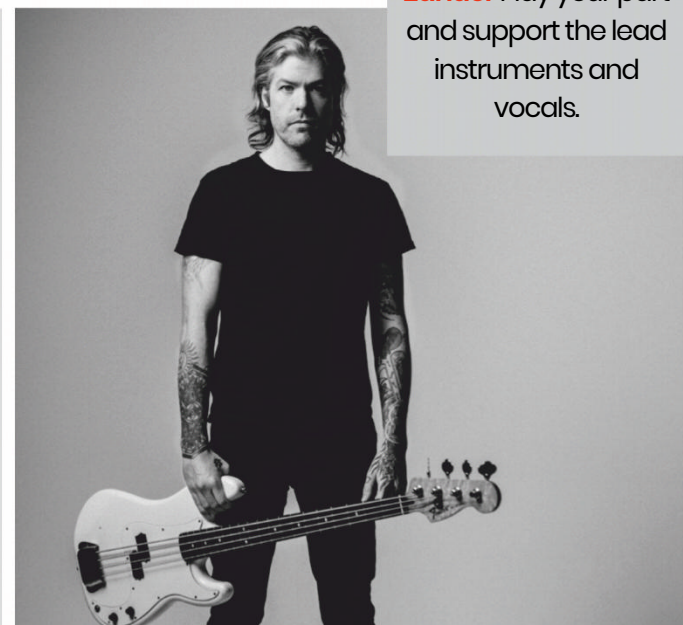


Photo: Ebru Yildiz

## JOE ROWLAND PALLBEARER

### WHAT ARE YOUR FAVE BASSES—AND BASSISTS?

**"M**y long-term love, and the basses I always come back to, are Fender Precisions. They are my favorite to play and the most natural and familiar-feeling in my hands. I love the sonics, the look, just everything. I own quite a few of them, but my favorite is one that I've modified a bit. It's just an early-2000s Mexican-made model, but it has a glorious birdseye maple neck. My favorite bassist of all time is definitely John Wetton. His phrasing, tone, and dexterity were all singular and set a high standard that I hope one day to come close to."

[www.pallbearerdoom.com](http://www.pallbearerdoom.com)

## ISSY FERRIS, FERRIS & SYLVESTER

### DO YOU PLAY WITH FINGERS OR A PICK?

**"I** first picked up a bass in 2017. It was an Epiphone Viola; I play with a pick and this was the perfect bass to do it, or at least I thought so after learning that Paul McCartney played the same way on his Hofner. If it was good enough for Paul, it was good enough for me. I love playing it. I fell in love with the bass instantly. It clicked. Playing bass gives me a power and character on stage that I hadn't

experienced before, and it's made me a better performer and writer. I also play a 1963 short scale Hofner. You wouldn't think it would have such a gritty, powerful sound, given its size and weight. I felt like it was the underdog when I found it. Kind of like me as a bass player, it wasn't the obvious choice but it had something about it. I've really grown as a player with it."

[www.ferrisandsylvester.com](http://www.ferrisandsylvester.com)

## ZANDER GREENSHIELDS, KING KING

### WHO'S YOUR FAVORITE BASSIST?

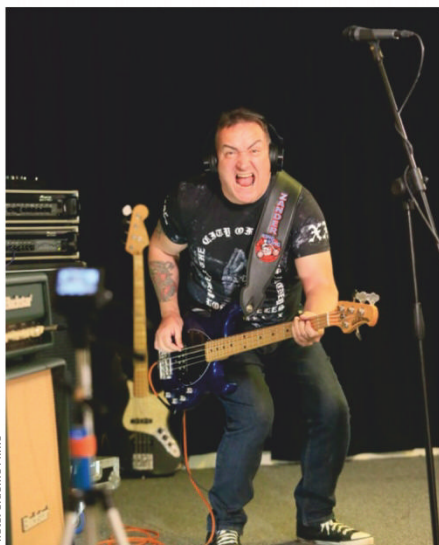


Photo: Graeme Milne

**"M**y main influence growing up was Steve Harris of Iron Maiden—his style is so iconic and unique. I also learned from drummers about locking in and sitting in the pocket. Without great bass and drums, the whole band will never sound great—and understanding this has carried me well. You can hear me locking in on our new album, *Maverick*, which is out now."

[www.kingking.co.uk](http://www.kingking.co.uk)

## LOUIS CRAIGHEAD, COLD YEARS

### WHY ARE BASS PLAYERS SO COOL?



Photo: Prate Photography

**"W**hen I was a kid, bass players were the guys who gave me the time of day to hang out. These dudes seemed pretty chilled, so I learned quite a lot from them—they showed me licks and teaching me about pickups and how important it is to sit on grooves. What I liked about bass—and still do—is that it's never just nerdy chat!"

[www.facebook.com/coldyearsband](https://www.facebook.com/coldyearsband)



In bass we trust:  
Ellefson in full flow



Photo: Getty Images

# David Ellefson, Megadeth

It's 36 years and counting since David Ellefson joined Megadeth, and despite an eight-year stint outside the band, when he worked in A&R for Peavey from 2002 to 2010, he's never really stopped recording and touring. In the last decade, he's established several businesses outside Megadeth under the banner of Ellefson Music Productions, which today runs to a record label, a booking agency, solo albums, books,

movie production, and a coffee brand, not to mention solo bass clinics and collaborations with many other musicians. His newest venture is a solo album called *No Cover*, for which he invited a host of rock and metal musos to record songs in and out of the rock and metal canon.

Ellefson is best known for playing splendidly pointy signature Jackson basses, for which US-made and affordable import models have been

available since he rejoined Megadeth in 2010. You'll also see him playing the Kelly Bird model which he designed for Jackson, and you may have seen our recent review of two more Ellefson basses, the X Series CBXM four- and five-string models. He also uses Hartke heads and cabs, SIT strings and GruvGear straps. With his extensive catalog, he's a perfect candidate for BP's Star Bass treatment... 



**MUST-HAVE ALBUM**

**MEGADETH**  
**Rust In Peace (1990)**



"The song 'Holy Wars... The Punishment Due' summarises everything that Megadeth was about in 1990, and probably still does today—lyrically and musically. The engineer at Amigo Studios who helped us demo the first three tracks was Garth Richardson, and he came up with the half-time bass-line in the middle section. That was clever, because the song doesn't leave a lot of room for anything other than just to buckle up and play along with the guitar.

"One of my other favorite bass-lines on the album is in 'Five Magics', and for me, the crowning moment as a bass player is 'Dawn Patrol'. When we were in the studio, our producer Mike Clink kept asking us if we had another song to add to the record, and I had this bass-line that I put down with Nick [Menza] on drums.

"I borrowed an eight-string Yamaha bass from Dio's bassist Jimmy Bain to write 'Dawn Patrol', and that's where I first learned that an instrument can have a song in it. As soon as I picked that bass up, the riff fell out. I would never have come up with that riff on any other instrument.

"*Rust In Peace* definitely still stands up today. Megadeth's fans tend to love it, for good reason."





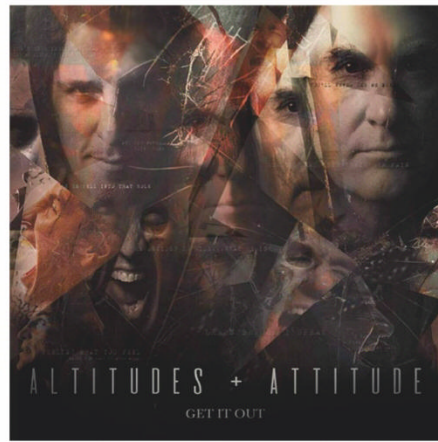
## WORTHY CONTENDER

### ELLEFSON

No Cover (2020)



“This album starts with my earliest childhood recollections of rock music, with the Sweet, Nazareth, Bachman Turner Overdrive, and then it goes through Kiss and my later influences. When we were choosing songs, we chose the ones that impacted me and Thom [Hazaert, vocals], and we never discussed doing the hits. Instead, we chose the songs that really had an impact on us. It was a privilege to really dig deep into the character of the playing of so many different bass players—and one who stood out was Steve Priest of the Sweet, who passed away right as we were starting to record. We wanted to honor him with our recording, and the same goes for the Fastway song we recorded, ‘Say What You Will’. That song was very popular in 1983 when I moved to Los Angeles, met Dave [Mustaine] and we started Megadeth. I know Pete Way didn’t actually record bass on it, but it has a very ‘Way’ feel about it. And then we did Motörhead’s ‘Love Me Like A Reptile’, which I used to play as a teenager: I noticed that Lemmy’s strumming style is similar to how you strum an acoustic guitar, which was unexpected. I used a Modulus Quantum five-string for a lot of the songs, recorded into Logic through an IK Multimedia Axe interface.”



## COOL GROOVES

### ALTITUDES & ATTITUDE

Get It Out (2019)



“As Frank Bello of Anthrax and I were on tour with the Big Four in 2010 and 2011, we were doing bass clinics, and at one event in London I leaned over to him on stage and said, ‘Why don’t we write some original songs to play along with?’

“That started the train moving forward towards a joint project, which started with a song called ‘Here Again’, which I wrote on guitar so we could play along with it. We used it at a Bass Player Live event in Los Angeles. The songs that Frank sent to me were very clever, singer-songwriter tracks that inspired me to play in a completely different way to my usual style—this time, I was really inspired by Colin Moulding of XTC and Graham Maby, the bassist in Joe Jackson’s band, who played with lots of melodies.

“I remember seeing Joe Jackson on a TV show when I was a teenager, and Graham’s amazing, picked bass-lines really helped to carry the songs alongside the vocals. I even took some high octave slides from Adam Clayton of U2, so the influences on bass were completely different this time.

“ESP brought an eight-string bass down the studio—and when it arrived, I immediately called them up and bought it over the phone. That bass is the signature sound for the Altitudes & Attitude album.”



## WILD CARD

### SOULFLY

Prophecy (2004)



“In 2004, I was working for Peavey and experimenting with a project called F5, and I got the call from Gloria Cavalera that Soulfly wanted me to play bass on half the songs for their new album, *Prophecy*. The other half were played by Soulfly’s bassist Bobby Burns.

“I knew Gloria and Max [Cavalera, Soulfly founder] a little bit, and I had heard some of Soulfly’s music, so I went to their rehearsal studio and we jammed. What was great was that Max is so relaxed about my bass parts. I’d say ‘What do you want me to do in this part, Max?’, and he’d say, ‘Hey, you’re David Ellefson—you do what you think is right!’

“It was very casual, and actually the opposite of what I’d been used to with Megadeth, where all the notes that I played were very nuanced and aligned with each other. I did a couple of weeks of touring with them and I was also in a video, which we filmed up in the desert in Utah. It was such a pleasure to work with them on that album.

“That whole decade was all about me playing with young musicians who used all these crazy tunings, which were completely different to the traditional E tuning that we usually used in Megadeth, and all these experiences really opened my eyes to different ways of doing music.”



## AVOID AT ALL COSTS

### THE ALIEN BLAKK

Modes Of Alienation (2004)



“The Alien Blakk is a project that is fronted and composed by a guitarist called Josh Podolsky. I met Josh around 2004; he was the guitarist for the rapper Coolio, who performed at the Peavey booth at NAMM.

“Josh was insistent that I play on his record, which was being recorded right at the time I was going into the studio to play with Soulfly, and at the same time I had just settled a pretty highly-publicized breakup with Dave Mustaine; in fact, literally that same afternoon I had just run into Dave at Starbucks in Scottsdale, Arizona, where I live. Between those three bands, that was quite a week.

“*Modes Of Alienation* was progressive rock, which I was familiar with, but it didn’t exactly reek of hit singles and I was very busy at the time, so to me, it was a record that made sense to Josh, but it didn’t make too much sense to me. With no disrespect intended to him, I guess I’m always a bit of a bleeding heart when it comes to musicians who are trying to get things going, and he was out of Coolio and I was out of Megadeth, so there was a little bit of brotherhood between us in that sense.

“Still, music was a common path for the both of us, which ultimately is a good reason to do anything. I wish Josh all the best with his music.”



# THE Lowdown

## I WAS THERE!

A historic moment in bass world—recalled by those who were there to see it

## Pink Floyd return with new bassist **Guy Pratt** for 1988's *Delicate Sound Of Thunder*

**P**ink Floyd's 1988 live album *Delicate Sound Of Thunder* is set for reissue on Blu-ray, DVD, double-CD, triple, and quadruple vinyl on November 20. The audio has been remixed and the concert film has been re-edited from the original 35mm footage, enhanced with 5.1 surround sound and bundled with a stack of bonus material.

The live album was originally released as a document of the two-year tour following the release of 1987's *A Momentary Lapse Of Reason* album. In our world, this epic release matters because Floyd's founder bassist Roger Waters had gone solo in 1985, with Guy Pratt taking his place. Pratt had played with Robert Palmer and Bryan Ferry—but had no experience of global touring at Floyd's level, as he tells BP.

"I was only 25 at the time" he muses. "It was a whole new world, where you asked for anything and it was done for you.

The only basses I took with me were a Steinberger, my 1964 Fender Jazz 'Betsy', and a fretless Status. A Stingray was sent over, and I wanted a Spector because Bernard Edwards was playing one. Fortunately they sent me three!

"I realize now that all my bass decisions were wrong. It never occurred to me that maybe I should get a Precision. I knew Roger had played one, but I didn't really like them, and I thought Betsy was enough. But even then, I didn't turn the bridge pickup off to make it more Precision-y.

"Trace Elliot had just come out with their MP11 MIDI preamp, so I insisted on having one and taking it over on the plane. Unfortunately it got lost, and the band had to wait for me at Toronto airport while they located my amp, even though I hadn't met most of them..." ■

*Delicate Sound Of Thunder* is out now on Warner (UK) and Sony (elsewhere).





The maestro today:  
Older and wiser, but just  
as astounding a player



## Low Life

**W**elcome back, bassists! This month I'm taking on a question from one of our readers, Gabriele Johnny De Toffol, about how best to prepare large amounts of material in short spaces of time.

This is common when taking on dep work or last-minute gigs, so I always start the process by making sure I have the relevant resources—such as a full list of tracks with key signatures, live recordings if the original arrangements are altered, and any other important notes from the band leader. Depending on the performance context, you'll either have the leeway to take charts on stage—in which case, ask for those—or you'll need to know them from memory.

Firstly, I would recommend compiling a playlist of the tracks, so they are all in one place. This could be upwards of 30 songs in some cases, so it's a good idea to have the playlist

on your phone, so you can listen to it in the car or while walking. This constant exposure will help you to familiarize yourself with the songs and their structures. You should then section up the list to form 'mini-sets' of six to eight tracks, so the task becomes manageable. If you only have a few days to prepare, space out the learning of your mini-sets over that time period.

On Day 1, plan to work through the majority of the set, leaving a sufficient break between each practice session to allow it all to sink in. Don't worry too much about detail at this stage—get the root

progressions under your fingers and pick out any signature elements that need to be there.

On Day 2, start by revisiting the tracks from the previous day and tidying the performances up. This will be a good indicator as to which songs will generally be fine, and which may prove trickier to embed—and therefore which to spend more time on. The rest of Day 2 should be spent tackling the rest of the set, again with regular breaks and revisiting.

On Day 3, revisit the whole setlist and try to play through it as regularly as possible. Repetition is key! Good

# LEARNING LONG SETS

Commit those epic setlists to memory every time!



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knowledge of music theory, in combination with the key signature information for each track, will also help you cover any blank moments. Ultimately, give yourself an achievable framework to follow, and it should all slot into place.

Do you have any questions surrounding live performance? If so, I would love to hear them. Please write into Bass Player and I'll broach them in an upcoming issue. Catch you all next time! ■

**O**n your continuing quest to attain the optimal setup, you've probably wondered about how to best adjust the height of your pickups. I receive regular inquiries requesting "factory set-up" data, including specifications for optimal pickup height. As we've previously discussed, the adjustments required to achieve one's best personal setup are subjective—but optimal pickup height is more objective.

There are functional aspects of pickups that make proper adjustment important if they are to deliver their best possible performance. Since few published manufacturer guidelines related to pickup adjustment exist, I've consulted the chief designers and owners of Bartolini Pickups and Aero Instrument, Clyde Clark, and Larry Pollack, for their recommendations.

To begin, it's important to recognize that a pickup's harmonic response is influenced

by its distance from the strings. The closer a pickup is to the strings, the better its relative ability to sense the fundamental. Adjusting a pickup closer to a string will improve its bass response, while moving it further away diminishes the fundamental and bass response with it. Reducing the distance between the top of a pickup and the strings also increases the sensing strength of a pickup exponentially. Halving a pickup's distance from the strings can potentially increase its output by four times.

For these reasons, many pickups' best performance is

achieved by adjusting them relatively close to the strings, avoiding contact with strings when oscillating. In the case of bar magnet type pickups—those without exposed poles—it is possible to adjust pickups close to the strings. However, stronger magnetic fields created by many flatwork style pickups—those with exposed poles—can negatively affect string vibration when adjusted too close, reducing sustain and dampening tone. While this influence is most significant with light gauge strings, it is an important detail to consider when adjusting exposed pole pickups.

## The Woodshed

# ADJUSTING PICKUPS

Learn how to get those units into optimal position



Ace luthier Rob Elrick brings decades of wisdom to the table. Listen up as he delivers the verdict!

Players who strike down when plucking, rather than across the strings may need to adjust their pickups farther from the strings to avoid collisions between strings and pickups. It is recommended that pickups be adjusted as close to the strings as possible, while avoiding string contact with the pickups when playing.

Remember, achieving your ideal setup will sometimes require adjustments outside the expected range of typical recommendations in order to accommodate your personal playing style. ■





Nik Preston takes us through ways to exploit this often-ignored scale

# EXPLORE HARMONY IN THE WHOLE TONE SCALE

**W**e're back—taking a break from melodic minor modes this month to focus on some symmetrical harmony, this time in the form of the whole tone scale. This scale is symmetrical and hexatonic, meaning that it only contains six separate notes: 1, 2, 3 #4, #5 and ♭7. It provides us with a dominant chord with a raised 5th, raised 11th and natural 9th. It is used extensively over

dominant chords, and much like the melodic minor modes we have explored recently, it doesn't contain any 'avoid' notes. This means that any note we play over a 7#5 chord will sound harmonically correct. Be mindful that the symmetrical nature of whole tone can make it difficult to explore without sounding repetitive, though.

A quick note on nomenclature: You would normally expect a 7#5 chord to mean a chord with a natural 9th—in other words a

dominant chord extracted from the whole tone scale. This is often confused with other dominant chords that contain a raised 5th or flattened 13th, such as the altered scale, or fifth mode of harmonic minor—both of which have a flattened 9th.

For clarity, I would often advise using the 7#5 symbol to denote a dominant chord from whole tone, and a 7alt to denote a chord from the altered scale—a dom chord with a #5, but also a ♭9 and/or #9.

The characteristic sound of whole tone harmony is the inclusion of a natural 9th and a #5. There are also the fifth modes of both melodic minor and harmonic minor, both of which have an enharmonically equivalent ♭13th, but we will look deeper into those in future issues!

We often encounter 7#5 chords which are resolving, as in **Exercise 1**, but there are often dominant chords built on other degrees which appear not to be resolving. These may be built on the second degree, as in Duke Ellington's 'Take The A Train', which is similar to **Exercise 2**. The scales here are notated in stepwise form for illustrative purposes, so be sure to use them as melodically and expressively as possible. One way to break up any potential monotony from the rigid, symmetrical, intervallic structure of the scale is to use chromaticism. If we play the notes exclusively from the scale, we have no semitones whatsoever.

If we want to play the notes of the scale on strong beats of the bar in 4/4, then we can include chromatic passing notes on the weak beats. This will essentially enable us to outline the sound of whole tone harmony, while exploiting the colors available from chromaticism—see **Exercise 3**.

Another approach is to really explore larger intervals in our lines, as in **Exercise 4**. Many of us tend to get to this later in our development, largely due to the difficulty of accessing those intervals, but don't let that deter you. There is a huge range of expressive opportunities available through describing harmony via the use of larger intervals—and sometimes, playing only as fast as we can think and hear, as opposed to playing near the limits of our physical dexterity, can be both a wonderful discipline and provide a wealth of ideas.

As always, take it slowly at first, enjoy the journey and leave the practice room with more options than you entered with! ■

## EXERCISE ONE

Exercise One: Musical notation for a whole tone scale exercise. The staff shows a 4/4 measure with a C7(#5) chord and a whole tone scale (C, D, E, F, G, A) in the bass line. The fretboard diagram below shows the notes 3, 5, 2, 4, 6, 3, 5, (5) on the strings.

## EXERCISE TWO

Exercise Two: Musical notation for a whole tone scale exercise. The staff shows a 4/4 measure with a D7(#5) chord and a whole tone scale (D, E, F, G, A, B) in the bass line. The fretboard diagram below shows the notes 19, 17, 20, 18, 16, 19, 17, 15, 18, 16, 14, 12, 10, (10) on the strings.

## EXERCISE THREE

Exercise Three: Musical notation for a whole tone scale exercise. The staff shows a 4/4 measure with a C7(#5) chord and a whole tone scale (C, D, E, F, G, A) in the bass line. The fretboard diagram below shows the notes 8, 9, 10, 11, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 9 on the strings.

## EXERCISE FOUR

Exercise Four: Musical notation for a whole tone scale exercise. The staff shows a 4/4 measure with a C7(#5) chord and a whole tone scale (C, D, E, F, G, A) in the bass line. The fretboard diagram below shows the notes 10, 9, 11, 13, 15, 13, 14, 10, 14, 12, 12, 10 on the strings.





Tools of the trade: Cliff's new signature Ernie Ball Music Man Stingrays, ready to rock in 2021





# RAW POWER

There is no band like AC/DC. There is also no bassist like **Cliff Williams**. “Jazz makes me feel kinda twitchy,” he confesses to Joel McIver

**Photography:** Getty, Sony, Ernie Ball

“O h dear. Be kind!” quips Cliff Williams when I tell him that I’ve been carefully listening to the bass parts on his new album, *Power Up*, in preparation for this interview. He’s kidding, of course—you don’t play stadiums for 40 years without developing a thick skin—but at the same time, he’s definitely not on familiar ground today. This is because Cliff is in AC/DC, a band dominated

since its inception by huge guitars and vocals, rather than bass, drums, or anything else. The huge production of the semi-British, semi-Australian band’s shows, the cannons, the lasers, the inflatable ‘colleague’ Rosie, the pyro, the crowd participation, the massive sense of uncompromising heritage—arguably these are also more important to AC/DC... Or so you’d think, if you were less well informed on these matters than you and me.



## CLIFF WILLIAMS, AC/DC

**T**his is superficial, of course. In reality, Williams' bass parts are utterly integral to his band's music. Listen to more or less any of the guitar riffs that anchor AC/DC, the majority of which were written by the band's late leader and rhythm guitarist Malcolm Young: Their staccato nature leaves loads of space for the bass. Listen to the sparse, impactful drum patterns; they don't drown him out with rolls or flourishes. No, he's all over the sound of AC/DC, and nowhere more so than on their new album, *Power Up*.

The key to his bass style is simplicity and economy. If, as we do today, we want to drill down to the philosophy behind his millimetrically precise playing, it's actually easier to ask him what he doesn't do. For starters, he doesn't do five-string basses.

"I get lost with the damn thing," he chuckles. "That bottom string—what is it, a B? I only play a five-string bass when I'm out somewhere, and someone's playing, and they say, 'Come and have a play on a couple of songs' and the bass player has a five-string. I don't know where the hell I am, because I instinctively go to the bottom string. Wrong! Ha ha!"

### "It's about the song first, and trying to play it the best you possibly can each night"

He doesn't bother looking at YouTube for the next big thing in bass. "I'm stuck with the old stuff that I know and love. I still listen to Little Feat. There's probably a lot of great young bass players out there, but I'm just not aware of them. I do think Pino Palladino is a great player, and I had the distinct pleasure of having a beer with Rocco Prestia when Tower Of Power were playing in Florida. We went along and I got a chance to talk with him."

He doesn't listen to jazz. "My wife and I went and saw John McLaughlin years ago playing at some club, and it made me feel uncomfortable. It made me feel kinda twitchy. Too busy! My wife hated it, so we got out of there. So no, jazz is not for me. I know there's some awesome bass players there, though."

He doesn't play slap bass. Yes, I asked him that question, even though I had a good idea what the answer would be. I make a habit of asking inappropriate questions about slap, just to see what will happen. You can read Lemmy's answer to the same question elsewhere in this issue.

"I don't think the boys would have really appreciated me trying to slap around. They



AC/DC's current (final?) line-up (from left): Stevie, Brian, Phil (obscured), Angus, Cliff.

would have slapped *me* around, I think," he snickers. "I can't say I didn't try it, sitting around in a room on my own, just for shits and giggles. But I never wanted to be very good at it. Flea's a monster at that stuff, and there are other guys out there that are really good—but it was not for me."

He's also not trying to improve or evolve his bass playing. "I don't think it's changed much. I just try and do my bit as best I can," he muses. "If anything, it's a little simpler. I try to bring it down to what it needs."

All this stuff is extraneous, frankly—and make no mistake, Williams is already a

machine on his instrument. Listen to any of his recorded bass tracks: His grasp of pocket playing is awe-inspiring, although he can push and pull against the beat at will; his muting is extraordinary, clipping off notes with precision-engineered accuracy; and he redefines the idea of consistency.

How did he arrive at this style, we ask? "It just developed, from playing with the guys, and with the songs that we play," he explains. "The songs are very guitar- and chorus-driven, so I don't need to be noodling around underneath. I just need to be playing the framework, and driving it as part of the





rhythm section. That's how I've always approached it, and it's just developed over the years to where it is now. When I play, I mute with the pad of my hand; it's just a feel thing. If the string is ringing out a little too much, on this note here or there, I'll just mute it slightly, just to keep it all even."

Does he change up his bass parts on tour? "On live stuff, sometimes I'll vary it a little bit; I might put something in that I feel might work, and try it, but that's about it. It's about the song first, most definitely, and it's about trying to play the song as best you possibly can every night."

An attitude which the bassists who first influenced Williams would appreciate, we think. He recalls the first time that bass impressed him, as a young kid in Essex. "I remember standing outside a youth club and listening to some soul music, and hearing the bass-lines. This was before I'd started playing an instrument. I just stood outside and listened to the bass—it was incredible stuff. I had a buddy that somehow got hold of a lot of American blues records, and I'd go over to his place and we'd listen to them, and I don't know who the players were, but it was a type of music that really attracted me. I was

definitely in awe of the James Jamersons of the world: In fact, it might have been him who I first heard playing."

By the early Seventies, Williams was making his name in the psychedelic band Home, but he never listens to their music any more, he tells us. "My wife loves [the 1973 LP] *The Alchemist*, so now and then we'll put that on, but other than that I don't listen to Home that much. You know what, I'll have a listen. That's a long, long time ago. Damn, is it nearly 50 years ago?"

Williams joined AC/DC in 1977, three years before their singer Bon Scott died of a booze



## CLIFF WILLIAMS, AC/DC

and/or heroin overdose, depending on which source you consult, and Brian Johnson was recruited for the band's imperial phase. Several decades later, AC/DC—now Williams plus Johnson, drummer Phil Rudd, and guitarists Angus and Stevie Young, who are respectively Malcolm's brother and nephew—have had a chaotic time of it over the last six years or so.

The band's sixteenth album, *Rock Or Bust*, appeared in 2014 and was their first without Malcolm, who was suffering from dementia. The following tour, on which Stevie took his uncle's place, also included a replacement drummer, Chris Slade, depping for the sidelined Rudd, who was working through some rather serious legal issues.

Two years later, Johnson quit the band mid-tour with severe hearing damage, although the dates were completed thanks to the appearance of a certain Axl Rose of Guns N' Roses. Also in 2016, Williams announced his retirement: Then 66 years old, the bassist had been treading the boards with AC/DC since 1979, and had definitely earned a break. And yet here he is once more, just when we thought we'd seen the last of him...

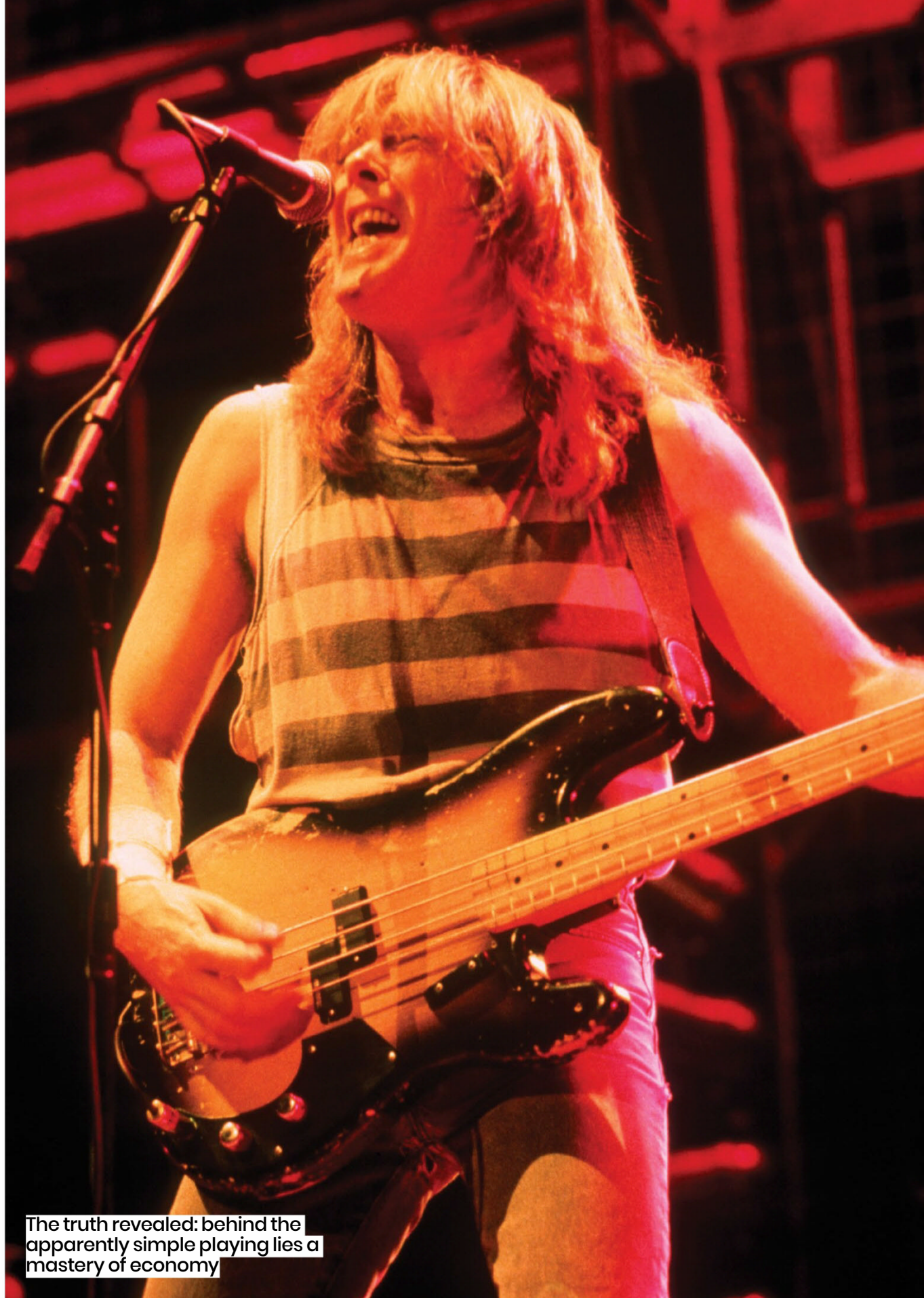
"I thought I'd seen the last of me too, ha ha!" he guffaws. "Look, I spoke to Angus on the *Rock Or Bust* tour—I said that I felt that I was done. It was my time, I guess. Phil had done the recording and then never did come on the road with us. He had his issues, and that's that, you know, so we had Chris Slade come in to replace Phil. And then of course we had that terrible thing with Brian, he really needed to stop, so Axl came in and did a bang-up job, God bless him, and got us through to the end of it."

He continues: "As Angus said, you can't have a tour called *Rock Or Bust* and [then go] bust, so we wanted to finish it, which we did."

**"We're hard pressed to slot in a new song live, as the guys have written so many damn popular songs people wanna hear!"**

And then that was it—we all went home and I was pretty much done. But Angus and Sony reached out a couple of years ago, asking if we would have any interest in getting together to do an album with Malcolm in mind."

This isn't the first time that AC/DC has reconvened after the loss of a member, he reminds us, citing a certain planet-sized album. "*Back In Black* had Bon Scott in mind. This album has Malcolm in mind—and because it was Brian and Angus and Phil and Stevie, I wanted to do it. And it went really well."



The truth revealed: behind the apparently simple playing lies a mastery of economy

Describing Malcolm Young as a "real strong character, like his brother", Williams says of his late colleague: "He wrote some awesome stuff and he was an unbelievable player to play with. A solid guy, a totally solid guy. We were talking about this the other day—it's like he's still there. Not being soppy and hippie about it, but it's a feeling that we all have, so hopefully he's looking down and liking it."

Our hunch is that, yes, if Malcolm Young is indeed relaxing in some hard-rock Valhalla and listening to *Power Up*, he'll like what he hears. It's punchy, upbeat and faithful to the sound that made AC/DC famous, but that doesn't mean it's one-dimensional. Listen to the thoughtful quasi-ballad 'Through The Mists Of Time' if you want to know what I mean.

Williams is quick to credit producer Brendan O'Brien for the vibrant feel of the new album. "God bless Brendan, he's just a fantastic producer to work with," he says. "He keeps it fresh, so you're not sitting around because there's always work going on. I couldn't have been happier."

Did he mic up one of his Ampegs in the studio, or go straight into the desk? "We did a bit of everything. We had the Ampegs set up, and an Avalon DI, and one other DI into the desk as well, so there was several different feeds that they put together. The way we record a take is that we'll all go for it, and if it's good then that's it. If not, we'll go back and do it again. You listen back, and you can feel if there's something that's not what it's supposed to be."



The bass parts came from Williams' trusty Ernie Ball Music Man Stingray, the 1979 model that has traveled the world more times than anyone can possibly remember. "It's always been my mainstay, and I've stuck with it, for the most part," he considers. "It's taken a beating over 40 years. I wandered off here and there a little bit. I used a Fender Jazz for a while, although actually that might have been before the Music Man. I also played a Gibson Thunderbird for a bit, but not for very long."

This leads us to the new Cliff Williams Signature Stingray, announced earlier this year and modelled on his 1979 original. "It's a fantastic bass," he says. "I was blown away by that. They had my old number one bass for over a year, I just got it back a couple

## "I don't think the boys would have appreciated me slapping around... They'd slap me around!"

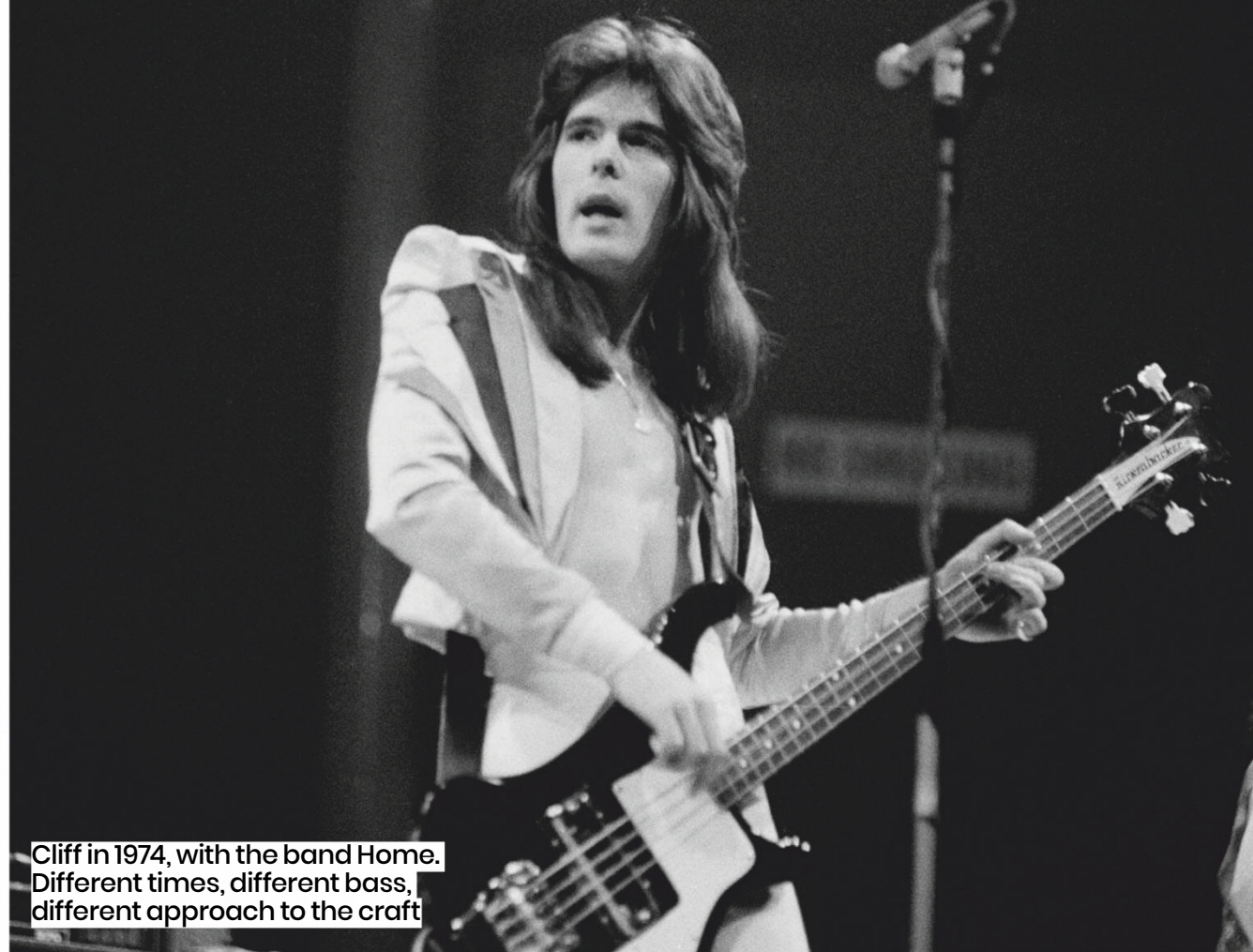
of weeks ago, and they did a bang-up job of it. It really is impressive."

Did Ernie Ball's team measure up the exact dimensions of the old bass? "Yeah, all of that. Every nick and ding and all the rest of it, cosmetically, they reproduced, but they got inside the thing too, and the pickups are tweaked exactly like mine. The whole thing is faithfully reproduced. They sent me a prototype and another one, so we had the three basses together and we went through each one—and I knew which bass my number one was, but they're so damn close it's very impressive."

He adds: "Those basses have even got a Sharpie mark on the treble knob, because if you have it full on, it's real glassy, so if you wind it back just a wee bit that glass goes away and you get a good, solid punch. They've even reproduced that on the signature bass, so you can dial that in. It sounds great."

Armed with a new bass and a new album, Williams seems set for whatever the future may hold. Fortunately, a painful-sounding accident a while back didn't deter him. He recalls, "About 15 years ago I took a fall, and put my hand out to break my fall, right onto some broken glass. It cut the nerves and tendons in my left hand. If I showed you my palm you would see the shape of the bottom of a bottle—a semicircle. I had two surgeries for that, and lots of rehab."

"The guys were awesome, they said 'Go and get yourself well and we'll pick it up from there' so now I can only play with two fingers, the two on the outsides. The two middle fingers, I just keep out of the mix. I've learned



Cliff in 1974, with the band Home. Different times, different bass, different approach to the craft

how to do that. I've got flexibility straight up and down, so I can make a fist, but when I try and bend those fingers individually, they don't bend. The surgeon was brilliant, but a couple of the tendons let loose, and I felt them when they did, so it was bad. But you know, you stick with it and you get around it. Thank God there's only four strings on the damn thing. I never looked at it as 'I'm never gonna play again', I just took the attitude that I've just gotta get over this and get it done."

On a more cheerful note, how does it feel to stand on stage with AC/DC, whose back catalog contains some of the world's most loved songs, and blast them out to a stadium audience? "It's brilliant. It's fantastic," he says. "When we do a new record, we're hard pressed to slot a song in from the new one, because the guys have written so many damn popular songs that people want to hear that we'd end up with a three-hour set if we weren't careful. I know McCartney does it, God bless him, but it's not like Angus running around. It's been fantastic to see audiences react to those songs, it's really heartwarming."

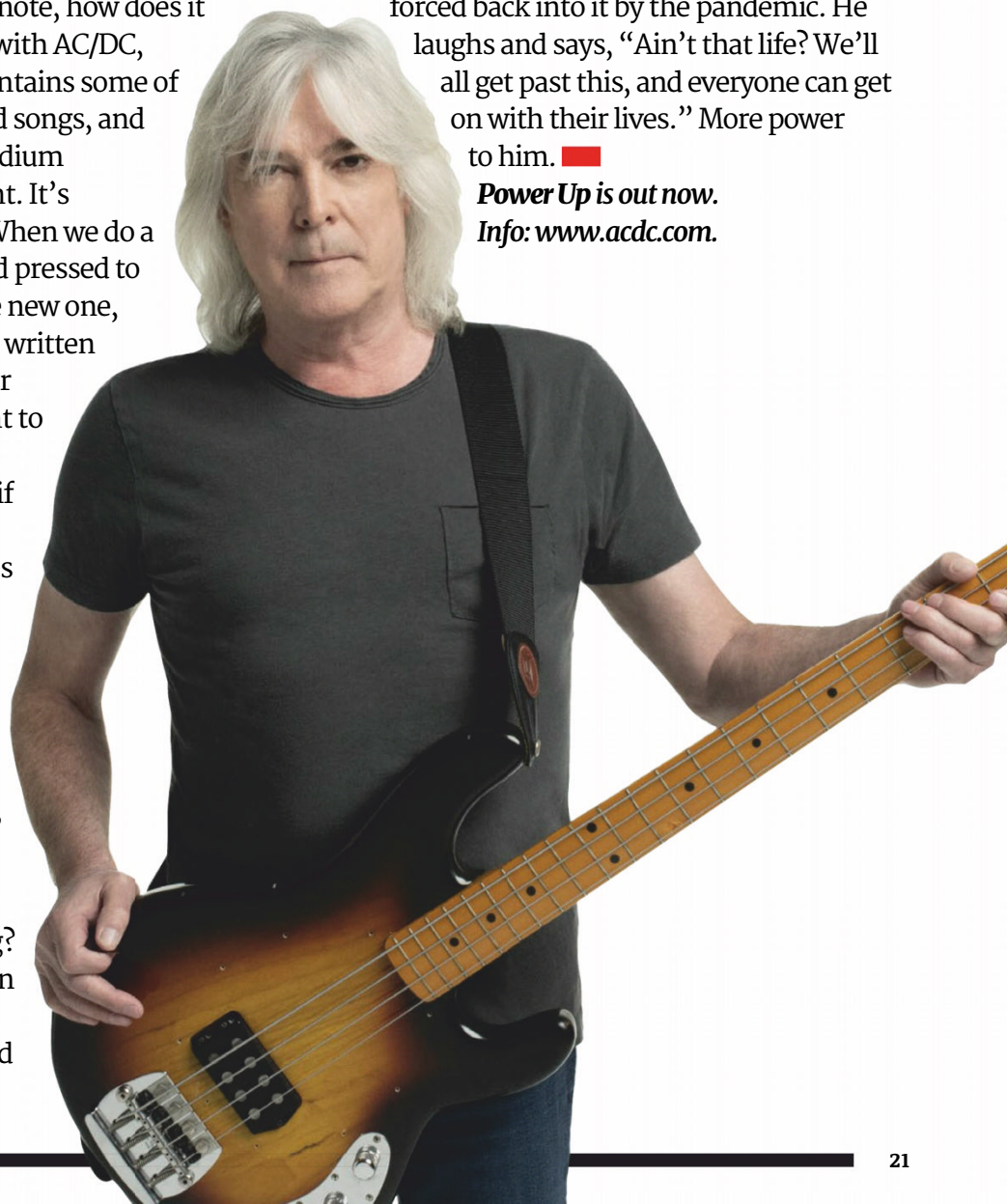
So will we see Cliff back on stage with his band, virus permitting? "We want to. Earlier on this year, we all got together and rehearsed for three weeks to see

how it would be—and it was fabulous. The band was playing great and the conversation got around to 'Is everyone up for playing some shows?' I said 'I would love to play a few shows' so everyone was like 'Great! Let's go home and get the guys to work on putting the shows together', and then of course the world went on lockdown. We're hoping that lifts, because we would love to play some shows."

It would be sadly ironic, we suggest, if Williams came out of retirement only to be forced back into it by the pandemic. He laughs and says, "Ain't that life? We'll all get past this, and everyone can get on with their lives." More power to him. ■

**Power Up is out now.**

**Info: [www.acdc.com](http://www.acdc.com).**





# WINNING WAYS

Remember our \$13,000 bass gear giveaway in *Bass Player* 400? Thousands of you entered, and these lucky 33 readers won a prize...

**W**e've spent the last month or two sifting through the huge number of entrants to this competition, and we're grateful to everyone who gave it a shot. We're also immensely thankful to the manufacturers and distributors who supplied us with such amazing prizes—which, in case you've forgotten, included:



- A **Fender** 60th Anniversary Jazz bass with two Pure Vintage '62 pickups, a pair of concentric volume and tone controls, an alder body and maple neck with a bound rosewood fingerboard, bone nut, vintage-correct 7.25" radius, vintage tall frets, and a 60s 'U' profile.
- A BP signature bass made by Austrian luthiers **Bite**. The Bass Player Magazine 400th Issue BITE Jawbone PJJ Custom Bass has 11 pickup configurations, an alder body and a 'Matte Speed Finish' maple neck.

- A **Yamaha** BB434TBS bass
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- Five \$30 vouchers for the **Overwater** webshop, plus a \$750 voucher towards one of their stock basses
- **Phil Jones Bass's** super-portable Bighead Pro HA-2

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  - **Focusrite's** Scarlett 2i2 3rd Gen interface.
- A huge, huge thanks from us to all these great companies for their generosity.**

**WINNERS** VALERIE ANDERSON, PETER ANDREWS, JAMES BIRD, GLYN DAVIES, JASON DAWES, JON EREMUS, CHARLIE GEERE, EMILY GIBSON, JODIE GILLESPIE, PETER GREY, DAN HEARD, ETHAN HENRY, STEPHEN HORVATH, UZZY HUSSAIN, TOBY JOHANSEN, STEVEN JOHNSON, GAVIN MARKHAM, GREYUM MAY, ROMAN MCGOLDRICK, WEST MCGOWAN, KENNY MCKAY, REMI OBASA, ALEXIS OLGUIN, CALLUM ORD, THOMAS PASCHE, STUART PHILLIPS, RUPESH RANA, PAUL SACKMAN, JOHN SCOTT, CHARLIE SCOTT-MOODY, JEROMY SIMONOFF, TOM SWEENEY, WADE WAGNON.

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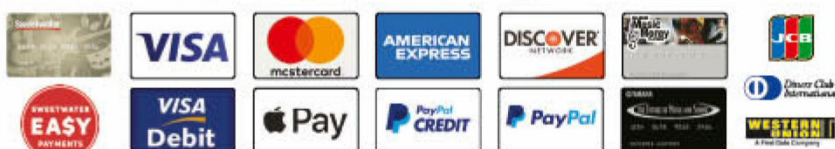
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Contrary to received wisdom, in the early Seventies Elvis Presley was on phenomenal form





# NASHVILLE BOUND

Producer, author, and bassist **Norbert Putnam** looks back half a century at a session with a difference—the near-mythical Nashville Cats recordings with Elvis Presley

**Interview:** Joel McIver **Photography:** Getty, Ernst Mikael Jørgensen and Pål Granlund

“I tell young musicians that we recorded 35 tracks in five nights, and they tell me that’s impossible!” snickers Norbert Putnam, bassist with Elvis Presley from 1970 to 1977. The kids’ reaction is understandable: Even by the prolific standards of the Seventies, when bands routinely released two or three albums a year, that’s a work rate that beggars belief. It really happened, though, and it’s a privilege to speak today with a musician who saw it take place.

We’re talking to Putnam—‘Putt’, as the late King called him—because RCA, Elvis’s record label for the last 65 years, is releasing *From Elvis In Nashville*, a new box set. These recordings come from a sustained five-night session at RCA’s Studio B in Nashville in June 1970, plus an additional one-off event in September.

Alongside the house band, the Nashville Cats—of which Putnam was a key member—Elvis did indeed cut 35 songs, live, and on peak

form. These songs went on to form three albums, *That’s The Way It Is* (1970), *Elvis Country (I’m 10,000 Years Old)* (1971), and *Love Letters From Elvis* (also ’71). The songs have been remixed to get rid of subsequent overdubs and orchestration, getting us closer to the original feel of Elvis plus band in an efficiently creative space.

Although we know now that within a couple of years of the Nashville session, Elvis sank into a state of poor mental and physical health that culminated in his death in ’77 at the age of only 42, Putnam makes it clear that the great man was firing on all cylinders in 1970.

“You couldn’t see an ounce of fat on him,” confirms Putnam, now 78 and still taking occasional bass sessions. “He was working

out, and he was doing karate. His bodyguard Red West was there, and he and Elvis gave us a few karate demonstrations. They were pretty impressive, believe me. Elvis used to lean forward with his index and middle finger out, and throw a punch right at Red’s eyes. He could stop one inch from Red’s face, which scared the shit out of everyone, ha ha!”

Elvis was famously fond of guns, as you’ll know if you’ve read any of the sometimes damning books about him, and it wasn’t long before the subject of firearms came up, explains Putnam. “Someone asked him, ‘Elvis, what do you do if someone points a gun at you?’ and he said ‘Red, get a revolver’. All of [Presley’s entourage] the Memphis Mafia carried a shiny aluminium camera case, and of course one of them contained weapons. So Red goes over to the weapons container and gets a revolver. He takes the bullets out—thank God—and assumes the position, pointing the gun at Elvis’s face.

“Elvis leaps forward and does a karate chop across Red’s wrist, and the weapon goes flying

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**“Over seven years, I did 120 tracks with Elvis, and he never, ever changed a note...”**



## NORBERT PUTNAM

across RCA B. Now, at the back of the room, our guitarist Chip Young had two or three guitars leaning against the wall, with the backs of the guitars facing outwards. So this gun goes somersaulting across the studio and goes right into the back of Skip's beautiful, handmade Spanish guitar. He had paid a lot of money for that guitar, so I'm looking at it, and Chip's looking at it, and then we all look back at Elvis.

"All the Mafia were saying 'Oh Elvis, that was great' because they were paid to applaud everything he did, and Elvis goes right into another karate demonstration. Meanwhile Chip Young is having a heart attack because he's paid several thousand dollars for that guitar, but then the guy who looked after Elvis's money comes up to Chip, asks 'How much for the guitar?' and writes him a cheque on the spot!"

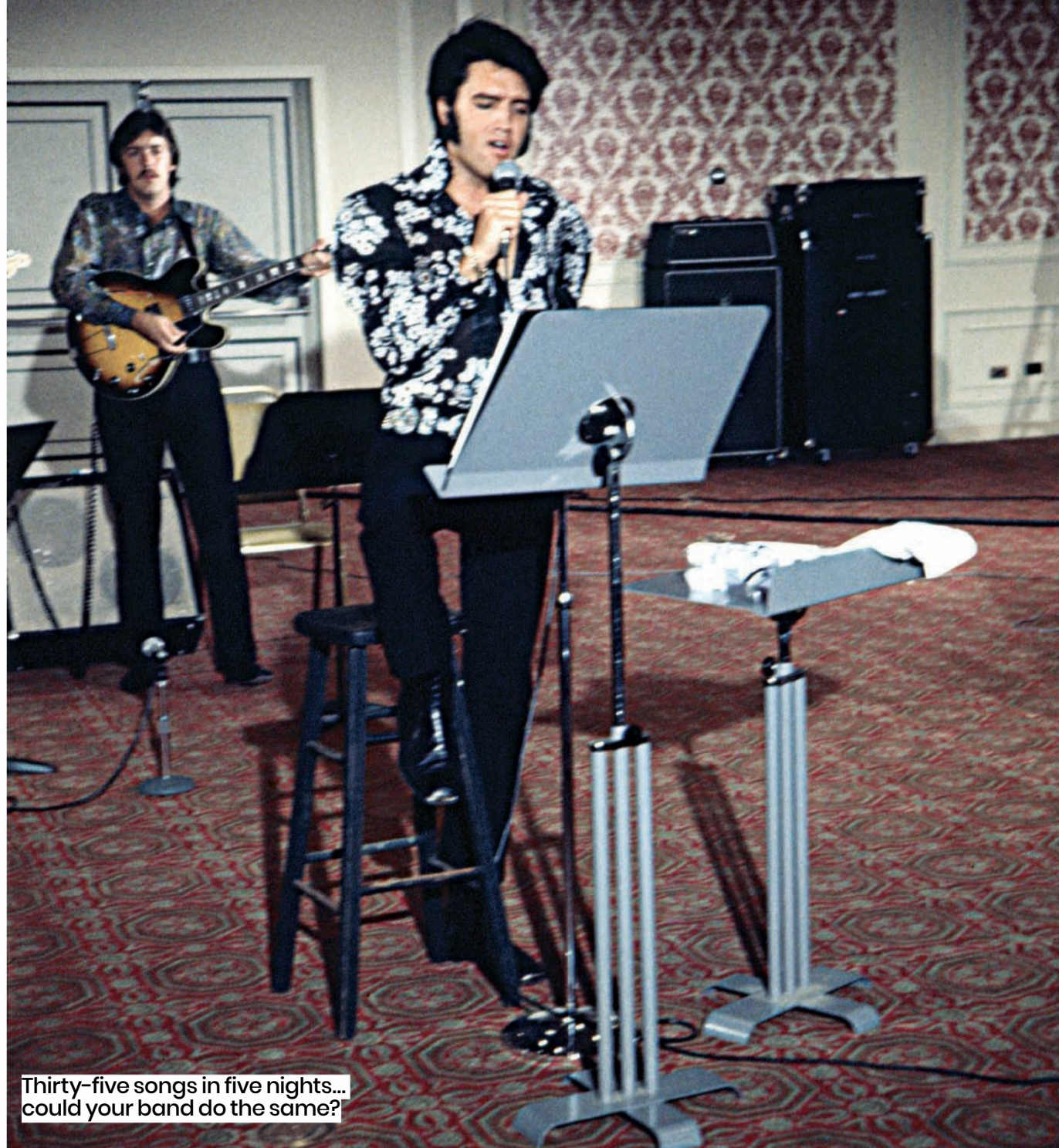
We've already talked about guns and rock'n'roll—we might as well ask about drugs. Did Putnam ever see Elvis taking the uppers and downers that eventually contributed to his death? He pauses to consider before replying, "I don't think he was taking *hard* drugs, but I can tell you that in June of 1970, I'm sure he was taking what they called 'medication'. Every hour, one of the guys would take Elvis into the bathroom, and we were not allowed to go in when he was in there."

"Then again," he points out, "I've had a lot of music friends get hooked on drugs. There was one drummer I knew, a famous L.A. musician, who used to tie off his arm and shoot heroin five minutes before a session started. After he got the smack in his veins, he was totally normal. He led the band through the session and never made a mistake, because he'd built up some resistance. Maybe Elvis had that sort of resistance too, because he was always so sharp."

You know what the popular history of Elvis Presley suggests: That he was a red-hot rock'n'roller in the Fifties, sank into a terrible movie career in the Sixties, and ended up a fat joke in a white jumpsuit in the Seventies. Of course, there was more to him than these simple clichés. In 1970, Elvis was performing with maximum skill, still enjoying a wave of public appreciation after his 1968 *Comeback Special*, on which he had appeared lean and mean in black leather—and he was still only 35. As Putnam tells it, the King was full of enthusiasm for music, and for life, when he walked into Studio B.

"Back then, I was booked every night at RCA from six to nine PM and then from 10 to one AM. All the Nashville studios ran that

**"He was a great storyteller. He'd have us rolling on the floor for hours with funny stories"**



Thirty-five songs in five nights... could your band do the same?

way. I'd play sessions in the morning and the afternoon too—in 1970 I played 625 record dates! Anyway, the producer, Felton Jarvis, called me and said 'Hey, you can come and play for Elvis, can't you?' I said yes, because I thought it would be another great notch on my belt. I'd already worked with Ray Charles and a lot of the big pop stars, so I went down there with my 1965 Precision and an Ampeg B-15 bass amp—and at six PM we were all

there, with all the instruments levelled and ready to go."

Make no mistake, this was a band for the ages. It included pianist David Briggs, multi-instrumentalist

Charlie McCoy, drummer Jerry Carrigan and Elvis's live guitarist James Burton; between them, these musicians had either worked with or would go on to work with Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, Bob Seger, Willie Nelson, Dean Martin, Joan Baez, Nancy Sinatra, B.B. King, Johnny Cash, Dolly Parton, Waylon Jennings, George Harrison, Todd Rundgren, Kris Kristofferson, and Alice Cooper, among many other artists. Putnam himself has shared a stage or studio with a galaxy of stars, Roy Orbison, Jimmy

Buffett, Henry Mancini, Dan Fogelberg, Linda Ronstadt, J. J. Cale, and Tony Joe White among them.

And now it was Elvis's turn. Again, if you refer to the canon of Presley literature, you'll find that he is often depicted as a moody, petty, insecure individual at best—and while some of these traits probably emerged at a later point in his life, in 1970 none of this was evident, at least to the Nashville Cats.

As Putnam recalls: "Elvis always came in at eight o'clock precisely—two hours late!—with a big smile on his face, saying 'Guys, do I have a funny story to tell you', and he'd talk about himself, sometimes in the third person. He'd gather us all around him, because he was a great raconteur—a great storyteller—and because all the seating was around the walls, we all sat on the floor in a circle, even though the tiled floor wasn't exactly clean. Let me tell you, over the next two hours, until 10 PM, Elvis had us rolling with funny stories."

He muses: "What's funny is that after hearing him talk, I'd convinced myself that I knew this guy, because he grew up in Tupelo, Mississippi. I'm talking to you today from Florence, Alabama, which is where I grew up. That's only 70 miles from Tupelo, and Elvis was just like all the kids I knew when I was



growing up, except he was seven years older than me.”

Finally, the producer stepped in to crack the whip. “Felton Jarvis would come up and say ‘Now, Elvis, RCA is expecting us to turn in some tracks this week, and it’s 10 o’clock, and we need to get started’ and Elvis said ‘Okay, Felton—what are we doing first?’ Felton said ‘Well, we talked about doing an album of country classics, and we want to do a second gospel album, and we might get started on a Christmas album too, and I’ve got seven pop songs’. As he says this, I’m adding this up—and that’s 37 songs, which I thought was impossible to do in five nights. But Elvis said ‘Let’s do this!’ and we went straight into ‘20 Days And 20 Nights’, an old country song.”

## “Elvis leaps forward and does a karate chop on Red’s wrist, and the gun goes flying across the room”

The setup was clean and simple, he remembers. “Elvis had them put a long, 20-foot cable on his microphone so he could walk over and stand about eight or nine feet in front of us—guitar, bass, drums, and piano. No headphones back then, either. We had to play quietly so his mic wouldn’t pick us up.”

The band was so finely honed, he adds, that recording progressed swiftly. “The Nashville players had special knowledge. They would play us a demo, and I would grab a legal pad and sketch out the chord progression, the bass-line and any prevalent syncopation. I would draw five lines and sketch it in. We would literally hear a song one time and be



Behind the fashions, the hangers-on, and the dubious lifestyle choices, there was a genius



Jamming with James Burton in Spain in 2012

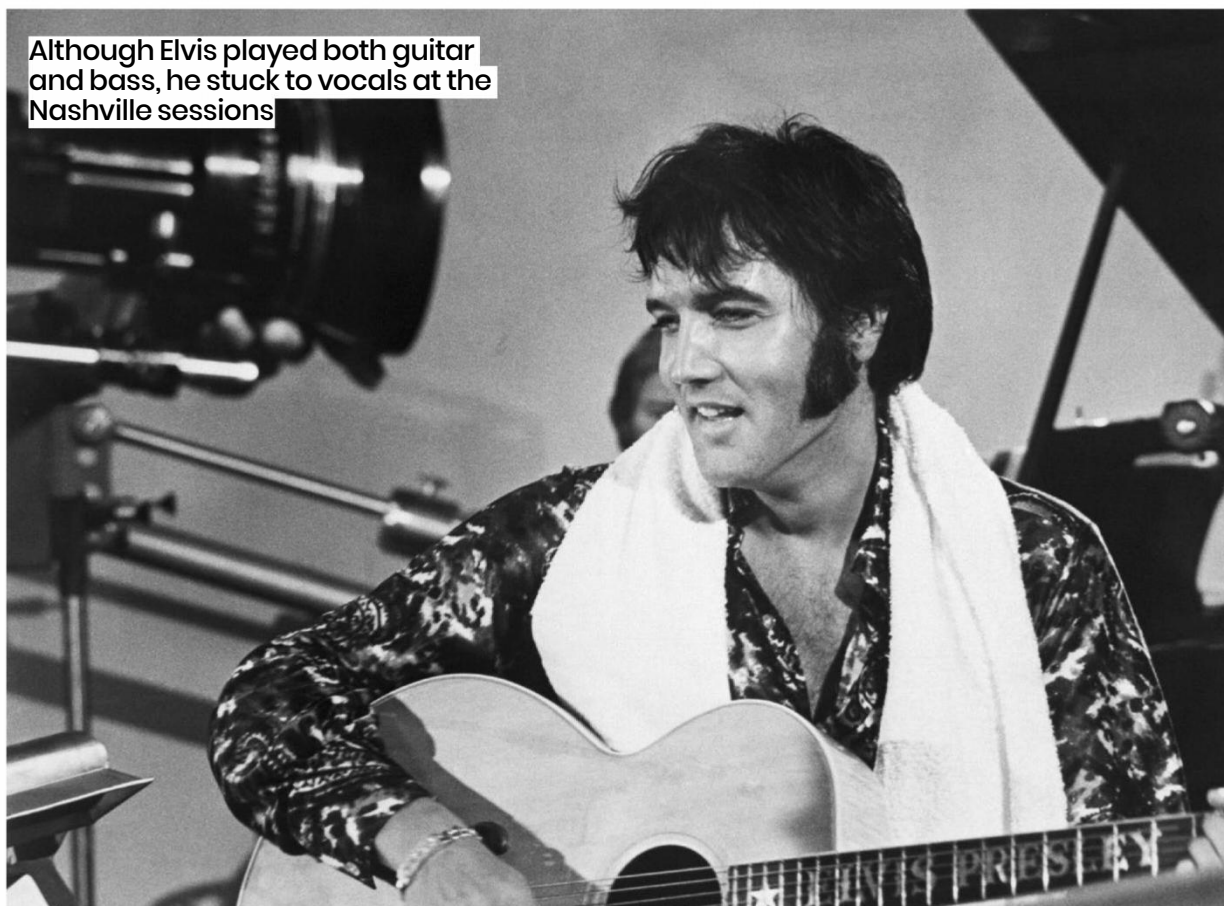
ready to play it, based on the arrangement we’d just heard.”

Elvis himself matched their prowess, recalls Putnam, although the King was taken aback by how fast the band worked. “He was so quick and so good,” he says. “Elvis was a quick study, I have to tell you; he’d only go through a song two or three times, and he had great ears. He’d turn to us and say ‘Do you guys have that? What key was it?’ and Briggs would say ‘That was E flat’. Elvis would say ‘Can you move it up?’ and we’d go up to E. ‘A little higher?’ so we went to F. Carrigan would count it off, and the band would play the song flawlessly. Elvis would look at us, like ‘How do you do that?’ because he was used to spending a lot of time on songs, because he had to learn it by rote.

“What’s really weird is that he rehearsed his vocal with a demo singer—a guy who sounded like Elvis. Ha ha! It was bizarre. I’d be standing there, and I’d hear Elvis Presley sing with an imitator who’s imitating Elvis Presley.



Although Elvis played both guitar and bass, he stuck to vocals at the Nashville sessions



I should have asked him why he did that. But he wasn't interested in working up to a performance, in other words starting gradually on take one and building up to take three or four. No, he was full-on right from the start. We would run the song once for the engineer, and then record it with vocals. He'd be like 'Let's get it in the first take' and start breathing like an athlete. We played to his dynamic. He was almost conducting us with his body language, and I think that's the reason those records have such a great feel."

Did he give Putnam any feedback on the bass parts? "No he did not, and that really bothered me on the first night, so when I found myself standing next to him in the control room I said, 'Hey Elvis, are the bass parts sounding good to you?' He said 'Oh, Putt, they sound great!' and slapped me on the back. Over the next seven years, I did 120 tracks with Elvis, and he never, ever changed a note."

Elvis dabbled in bass himself every now and then; did he contribute musically to the sessions? "No," says Putnam. "It's been said that he picked up an acoustic guitar, but he never did that. He was so centered on his vocal performance. Sometimes he got it on the first take, with a really great vocal, but we realized that we needed another take to get a better rhythm track, so we'd say 'Elvis, we gotta do it again' and he'd say 'Fine'."

"I remember once I was standing beside him while we were listening to a take, and he said 'Hey Putt, what do you think?' I said

'Well, Elvis, could you do one more for me? I'm gonna change my part on the chorus, and David and Chip are gonna make some changes too'. He said 'Go do it. Felton, we're doing another one'. One night I walked in there and asked for another take, and he said, 'Oh, you wanna see me do it again? Let's go!'"

Elvis was so impressed with the Nashville Cats that he made them an unexpected offer. "He said, 'Look, you guys have made this so easy for me, I want you to come and be my Las Vegas band. What would it take for you to come and be my band?' We said 'Well, could you pay us what we would normally make in a week's work in Nashville?' and he said 'I'll have Colonel Tom call you'."

Enter the dread specter of Colonel Tom Parker, the manager who famously made Elvis a star and infamously took 50 percent off the top for doing so. What was he like, we ask? "Oh, he wouldn't talk to us lowly musicians!" chuckles Putnam. "I met Colonel Tom when he came to RCA B one night.

I remember his assistant walked in, holding a five-gallon jug of Mountain Valley water, because that was the only water the Colonel would imbibe, and behind him, in came the Colonel. He said 'Elvis, come here!' They talked for about 20 minutes and then he was gone, without saying goodbye.

"Six weeks later, Charlie McCoy got a phone call from Colonel Tom's assistant, who said 'Elvis wants you boys to come out. I understand you want \$2,000 a week'. Now, even back in 1970, I could make \$100,000

**"Elvis would rehearse with a demo singer - an imitator who was imitating him!"**



A scene from *Elvis: That's The Way It Is*, in rehearsal at MGM Studios

a year in Nashville just by going down to the studio every day, right? And this guy goes on, 'Colonel Tom's willing to pay \$350 a week and \$700 to the leader'. Charlie said 'We're going to have to pass'. Ha ha! So we never played live with Elvis Presley. In the film *Elvis: That's The Way It Is*, you can see the band that did play in Las Vegas listening to the songs we recorded, getting ready to play them on stage."

When Elvis and the band went their separate ways, Putnam didn't see him for another two years, by which point the King's later-life malaise had started to make itself obvious. "By the time '73 rolled around, his wife Priscilla had left him," he recalls. "We were asked to come over to Stax Studios to track, and when he came in, I saw that he had started to gain weight—maybe 15 pounds or so. He was a little pasty-looking, and was wearing this loose-fitting exercise outfit. His demeanour had changed: He wasn't as much fun." He adds, regretfully: "Four years after that, he was gone."





How did Putnam hear of Elvis's death? "By 1977, I was an established producer. It was a great year for me: Two of my artists had gone triple platinum. Dan Fogelberg had sold three million albums, and Jimmy Buffett had recorded 'Margaritaville', which went on to sell 40 million copies. That summer, I got a phone call from Felton Jarvis, and he said 'Hey Norbert, could you come and overdub bass on a Presley song?' I said 'Just one song?' 'Yeah. Elvis was on tour and he decided to go over the piano and sing the Everly Brothers song 'Unchained Melody'. It's the best vocal he's done in years, and we got it on multi-track. I want you to add bass to it'."

During the recording, Putnam asked Jarvis about his old boss's health. "He said, 'Well, Putt, he just gained so much weight. Last week I saw him eat a dozen eggs and a pound of

bacon for breakfast'. I said 'You're kidding?' and he said 'The day before that, he binged on banana splits—he had a dozen of them'."

"I said 'Is it just obesity that's the problem?' because I thought that could be dealt with, but he said 'No, it's more than that. Elvis has been pretty depressed lately'. I said 'Can't the Colonel or someone do something?' and he told me that Elvis had been in the hospital several times to get off his medication, but it just hadn't worked.

And I said 'Well, give him a hug from me'."

He continues: "Two months later I was on vacation in Hawaii, and I was in my car with the radio on, and

they were playing Elvis tracks over and over. That made me smile, because American radio did not play Elvis Presley's songs after 1970. We had payola back then, and the record company admitted to me that they stopped

paying payola after 1970. I said 'Why?' and they said 'Because we had this new guy from England called David Bowie, who was going to be the new Elvis'.

"I went into a store to buy some items, and this hippie guy said to the cashier, 'Did you hear about old Presley?' The guy said 'No?' and the hippie said 'He checked out'. I ran to my car and turned on the radio, and they were announcing it. I could not believe it. I thought, 'They let him die', and I sat there and cried."

Fifty years since those sessions, how does Putnam remember Elvis? "I remember him for how much fun he was, back in 1970. We were young, we were all playing great, and we had a great time. The reason we got 35 sides in five days was because he was having so much fun. He was just the absolute best, and that's how I'll always think of him."

***From Elvis In Nashville* is out now on RCA/Legacy Recordings. Norbert Putnam's autobiography, *Music Lessons*, is also available to order at [www.musiclessonsbynorbertputnam.com](http://www.musiclessonsbynorbertputnam.com).**

**"Even back in 1970, I could make \$100,000 a year just by going down to the studio every day"**



# GOING SUPERNOVA

Nova Twins bassist **Georgia South** brings a huge tone—and attitude—to modern rock music. We find out (partly) how it's done

**T**he UK-based duo Nova Twins, formed of guitarist Amy Love and bassist Georgia South, have been making a highly enjoyable racket for the last five years without making a huge name for themselves: None other than Tom Morello of Rage Against The Machine described them as ‘the best band you’ve never heard of’ after they supported his band Prophets Of Rage. That would no doubt have changed in 2020, given that the Twins’ debut album *Who Are The Girls?* was released in February, just weeks before the global shutdown wiped out a whole year’s worth of touring. Undeterred, South and Love have been writing and recording in this unexpected downtime, with the former also finding time to talk to *BP* about huge bass tones, bespoke effects chains, and pushing the demographic envelope.

## **What’s been keeping you occupied during the pandemic, Georgia?**

We’re in a routine of talking through FaceTime and sending ideas to each other, so we’ve been writing loads and working on the second album. We lucked out, really, because we have the time to do it. If we’d been playing festivals and touring, the second album would be rushed, rather than us having time to enjoy the process.

## **What basses do you play?**

I have three Westone Thunder I basses. I love them, and I’m so annoyed that they don’t make them any more—although that also gives them a cool edge, because they’re really hard to get hold of.

## **Why did you choose to play a Westone?**

I feel like it chose me. I was at a friend’s house and I saw the red one that I’ve got, hanging on the wall. I was looking for a bass at the time, and I was like, ‘My God, what is that?’ I’d never seen a bass that had that red zebra print on it. He told me it was his dad’s bass but that he barely played it, so I asked his dad if I could buy it and he said yes. It just sounds so fat, and even though it’s a passive bass with standard pickups, it has such a clean sound. I tried an active Westone but it glitches out the pedals too much and I can’t control it, so mine are passive.







### Where do you get your basses?

I get them off Reverb. I've never found another red one, but I've got my eye open for one. That one is super-rare as a passive bass, although there are loads of active ones. It's not like any other bass. It's so heavy to carry, which adds to it somehow. The way it plays with the pedals is so weighty. We've toured with huge bands like Prophets Of Rage, and Tim Commerford was like, 'Damn, your sound is huge!' even though I was only using a tiny Gallien-Krueger bass combo, and he had two massive stacks.

### Your sound is enormous. It sounds like you're running more than one distortion.

I've got a few distortions, but I don't really run down my pedals. If you look at my board it's all super taped up. I used to have it not taped up, but I'd do a show and people would just run up on stage, take pictures of my board and post it online, and I felt so violated. You've spent so many years building up this board and your sound, that for someone just to take a picture and copy it, I can't be dealing with it, so I just got some duct tape and stickers and taped the fuck out of the whole board. I can say that most of my pedals are very cheap and that anyone could get them. I guess it's the combination of effects that counts. Fender recently sent me a fretless Jazz bass, which is so different to my Westone, and sounds wicked with my pedals.

### Have you always had a monstrous tone?

I've always been driven towards distortion, for sure, but the pedalboard definitely grew through Nova Twins. I used to go to Denmark Street in London with my dad and not even know what I was looking for. I just knew I wanted a new pedal, so I'd try some out and think 'This is super cool'. It all blended really well, and after a while I knew what I needed to make the sound in my head. I love the sound of heavy electronic music and dubstep, with gnarly, heavy synth bass, but I knew that I

**"We didn't have a lot of people to look up to who looked like us. We just want people to feel empowered"**

didn't want to play a synth or have a laptop or keyboard—I wanted to play a bass guitar—so whenever I went to a shop I looked for sounds that I can manipulate and bend, which I love doing. It's like I'm singing through the bass because it moves around so much. You could sing the melodies that I play.

### Did you have specific tonal inspirations?

I looked at songs like NERD's 'Anti Matter'. I don't know if it's a bass or a synth, but the intro to that song was a revelation to me. I knew it was the kind of music that I wanted to make, if it made people feel like that. Hip-hop, too—I love Missy Elliott, Kanye West's *Late Registration* album, Eminem, Dr Dre, Skepta, Dizzee Rascal... I find inspiration in how the bass sits in those songs.

### How did you become a bass player?

I'm from a musical background. My dad William South is a jazz pianist and plays in the band Heavy Shift, and my brother plays bass and my mum sings, so we always jammed. I played piano when I was young, but one day when I was around 13 I just thought, 'I want to have something a bit more gnarly and to the front', so I picked up the bass—and I knew I wanted to be a bass player straight away. My dad taught me the basics and my first bass was a Fender Bronco, which I hated because I felt really uncool with it. I covered it in stickers and drew on it and it still didn't get any cooler. I played it so low too, down by my knees. You have to go through that stage, though.



Photo: Getty Images

### Did any other bass players inspire you back then?

There was a key moment when I was younger, when I started thinking that I could actually be a bassist as a career. It was when I saw Beyoncé and she had an all-female band, with Divinity Roxx on bass. She was doing a solo in front of the whole stadium—and, especially her being a woman of colour, I was like 'Damn! It's actually possible!' I met Divinity a while back and I got to tell her that, which was amazing because she was such an important part of my growth. I did a Destiny's Child cover when I was 16 and put it on YouTube, and she shared it and I said, 'Oh my God, she thinks I'm good!'

### What are your objectives with Nova Twins?

When we were growing up, we didn't have a lot of people to look up to in the music that we loved that looked like us, so it's been great growing our audience and seeing ourselves in there. We want to empower people of colour, to empower women, to empower the LGBT community, and anyone who feels like they didn't have a face to look to in rock, and just break that stereotype. When we were coming up, people were like 'Are you an R&B band? Are you dancers?' when we literally had guitars strapped to our backs. We realized that we need to wipe out this whole stereotype that you can only be an R&B artist or a rapper if you're black. We played a lot of festivals in 2019 and we would be the only women on the bill, or the only people of colour. Everyone should be able to listen to our music and feel badass and empowered. ■

Info: [www.novatwins.co.uk](http://www.novatwins.co.uk)



# GAME TIME

Think you've played some high-profile gigs? High-profile for **Adam Blackstone** means being the musical director for a Super Bowl halftime seen by 100 million people. We find out how he keeps his head...

**T**his year's Super Bowl took place in Miami Gardens, Florida on February 2nd, a couple of months before the world shut down for the foreseeable future—and while most of the nine-figure audience were focused on the result of the game, a certain bassist was paying attention to the half-time show. Readers familiar with the annual football event won't need to be told how massive it is, so much so in fact that the halftime performance has passed into popular culture as a celebratory event of its own. Name a stadium-sized band, and they've probably played the Super Bowl at some point.

This year the show featured two headliners, Jennifer Lopez and Shakira, and the musician entrusted with getting the music for their 15-minute performance right was Adam Blackstone, whose job as Shakira's bassist was essentially his easiest role on the day. An accomplished MD with previous form at the Super Bowl with Justin Timberlake's appearance in 2018, Blackstone was nominated for an Emmy for Musical Direction, his second such honor.

If you didn't see the show, you might want to watch it on YouTube before you read on. Performed at maximum intensity and with microsecond accuracy, the two headline sets are a flurry of visual and musical activity, with lighting, choreography, and a full-scale pyrotechnic production all operating at warp speed. In this brain-frying environment, most



of us would have trouble hitting a triangle on time, but Blackstone had to control and monitor the entire musical ensemble... While playing bass at the same time.

## **Adam, the scale of this event is hard to comprehend.**

My goodness, yes—the preparation alone was far greater than any of the playing, if I can be honest. We were on approximately Edit 60 by the time the Super Bowl actually happened. Just imagine learning the same song, 60 different ways! In some versions we'd take the bridge out, in some we'd leave the bridge in, shorten the chorus four bars, put them back in, add the intro, remove the intro... It was crazy.

## **How did you prepare for the gig?**

Around Thanksgiving of 2019, I got the call to be the MD of the show. Both ladies have their own respective teams, who are so great, but the NFL and the production company called

me and the ladies chose me as their common MD. So I flew to Barcelona right away to sit with Shakira, because she had just done a major international soccer event—like the Super Bowl of soccer—so she was already in the vibe for what she felt could work. She and Jennifer were very, very involved.

## **It must have been difficult to engage such a huge audience.**

I tried to enthrall the NFL viewer with what I thought they would respond to. You gotta remember, we were literally forcing a concert in the middle of a ball game—so we had to get in there, hit hard and get out of there, making a lasting impression in a very small amount of time.

## **Did you get to run through the show beforehand?**

We did. That rehearsal process is very time-aligned, because the football teams have to get on the field as well. It's not like we can



just camp out at the stadium, because they have to practise. We couldn't get in there with our instruments while they're throwing footballs around. In the week leading up to the Sunday game, they scheduled us for two hours each day for a few days.

**There was a three-second change-over between Shakira and Jennifer Lopez. That's a pretty tight schedule.**

Ha ha! Yes, it is. Because of the lack of change-over time, my job was to make it one seamless show. I had to bring fans of both Shakira and J-Lo into this rollercoaster ride, as well as intrigue people who might not be fans of those artists. That way we'd have one truly great show that would allow the two ladies to show their superpowers, and have it in one single setting.

**It sounds impossible.**

The Super Bowl show is what we call a catalog show, and it's only 13 or 14 minutes long, so doing that with one artist—as I did with Justin Timberlake—is already a task, because his catalog spans 20 years. Now imagine splitting that time down the middle with two legends, and trying to make both sets of fans feel like they didn't miss anything.

**Everything was so finely synched together. For example, at one point in her set, Shakira kicked her foot out and a ton of fireworks went off at that exact moment.**

Everything was timed out, and that's where a great, strong team comes into play, because a lot of the lighting directors and pyrotechnics people come to our off-site rehearsals and study the movements of the artist and the band. They build production around that, just like me doing a bass slide or a drummer hitting a crash cymbal exactly where it's supposed to be. All of the departments were recognized in the Emmy nominations.

**At one point, Shakira did some crowd-surfing. Tell me the people holding her up weren't just random members of the crowd?**

No. For that specific 11-second section, we definitely used stage hands and other people that we background-checked, so we knew they wouldn't get too crazy with our star girl.

**Presumably everything starts with the music you arrange, and then the other teams work off that?**

Absolutely. There's a lot of pressure on me to deliver sketches and rough mixes, because the whole show moves off of how the music is



J-Lo: kicking off her Super Bowl set after a three-second (!) switch

Photo: Getty Images

tracked. I was prepared from having done the Justin show, but dealing with two headliners was very interesting.

**Did that mean you had to get two lots of approvals for everything?**

Exactly! Fortunately most of my ideas were welcomed right away, although with some of them, they asked to see alternate versions. It was an ongoing thing, for sure. Shakira being in Spain for a while, and J-Lo shooting a movie in New York while the production people were in L.A. made things very interesting. Everybody was on a non-stop schedule.

**What was the role of your bass playing through all this?**

The bass was the foundation. It always is, for me. I don't plan to be a big solo guy; I like to play low on the bass, to establish the chord and the pocket, and to establish the rhythm with my drummer. I also like to set the tone and the dynamics of the song. People think the percussion does that, but I think the bass has a very similar role. If I'm playing

mezzopiano, or whole notes, or rolling to the front pickup to give it more of a round sound, that's how my band is going to play as well. It establishes the intensity of what's

going on, and with a show like the Super Bowl, you don't have a long time to do that, so you have to show the dynamics very quickly in order to tell your story.

**Was the bass played live, and if so, did you have a backing track ready just in case?**

Yeah. We did a pre-record of a rehearsal as a safety, but it was all us playing. If something goes down, like someone trips over a power cord or something, we need to have that safety—and if we have to use it, then it's still a track of us playing.

**When you're playing bass and being the musical director at the same time, how do**

**you do it? Do you split your brain in half?**

I'd say I split my brain in quarters, ha ha! The role of an MD, for me, is about learning everybody's part. I have to be able to tell my background singers 'Hey, we're gonna go to a three-part harmony here' or tell my horn players 'This line is two eighths and a quarter, not two quarters' or I have to tell my engineers and my programmer and my playback, 'Start this song on beat three'. As an MD, playing your own instrument is almost secondary: You worry more about the artist and their vibe and whether they're connecting with the music. After all that, then you worry about your own instrument, because by that time, I've lived with this music long enough that I can play my part pretty easily. I'm listening to everybody else through my in-ears, but I hire people that I trust so that I don't have to hone in on any one specific instrument.

**What bass gear do you use?**

I've been a Gallien-Krueger guy for 15 years now, they've been great for me. I use a 1001RB amp with a 4x12 cab. That configuration works perfectly with the kind of music that I play. Those boxes are so durable and light. I have a custom Fender Ultra Deluxe Jazz five-string, which is so incredible—I love the tone and the feel. Mine has a birdseye maple neck and all gold hardware. I have a Japanese Performance Jazz bass as a backup. I use all EBS pedals, because they're so clean and they don't disrupt your bass tone, Black Diamond strings, and a Korg keyboard for synth bass.

**What does an Emmy nomination mean?**

The biggest thing is that your hard work is recognized. Eventually I want to do the Oscars and the Tony Awards and other huge shows, and this nomination puts me into consideration for those events.

**You'll probably get called to do next year's Olympics.**

Ah, I would love that, man. God willing, I'll do a couple of 'em! ■

Info: [www.adamblackstone.com](http://www.adamblackstone.com)

**“We were on Edit 60 by the Super Bowl. Imagine learning the same song 60 different ways!”**

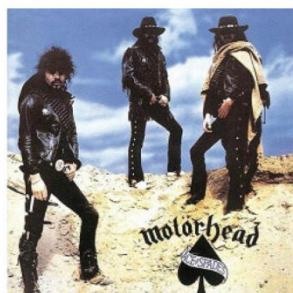


# ACE IN THE HOLE

Motörhead's immortal *Ace Of Spades* album is 40 years old, and to celebrate its legacy, we revisit our times with the sadly not immortal bassist **Ian 'Lemmy' Kilmister**. Raise a glass, salute the great man, and don't forget the joker...

**Words:** Joel McIver **Photography:** Getty

**F**our decades since Motörhead released *Ace Of Spades* on November 8, 1980, and five years since Lemmy died on December 28, 2015, BMG have released a luxurious box set of the album. It's a tasty artifact, and we have one that you can win—see the end of this feature—but at the same time, box sets like this are a common sight in the rearward-looking era in which we find ourselves. In these pages, we ask what makes this album so special, and we revisit a couple of classic chats with Lemmy, conducted when the world was a better place—because he was in it.



In 1980, with tour dates mapped out and a rising profile, Motörhead needed some new material. Sure, they'd released two albums the previous year, and an EP and a version of their debut album had been made available, but why stop there? Booking into Jackson's Studios in Rickmansworth, owned by producer Vic Maile, the band recorded their fourth album in August and September.

For some, the title of *Ace Of Spades* evokes the cover image of the three musicians dressed as bandits from the Wild West, although the shot was actually taken in London. For others, it's the sound of the lead single, also titled 'Ace Of Spades' and by far the most visceral song any band released that year. In the song, which leads off with Lemmy's instantly recognizable two-note bass riff, he invokes all the classic heavy metal tropes—dying young, living hard, reducing life down to the turn of a card, the roll of a

dice, and the rattle of ice cubes against a glass of bourbon. Clichés they may be, but they were Motörhead's clichés, and they sound so, so good to this day.

The *Ace Of Spades* album may not have possessed the acute lyrical angles that Lemmy introduced in

his later career, but it still sounded sharp, muscular, and threatening, with the songs taut and planned-out, rather than merely frenetic. Part of the key songs' attraction—and there were many; the obvious title track plus 'Live To Win', '(We Are) The Road Crew' and 'The Chase Is Better Than The Catch'—was their sleek power, captured thanks to the expertise of the late Maile, who died in 1989. Although Maile hadn't exactly carved out a niche in heavy music, he knew exactly what was required to commit the sounds of complex personalities to tape, having recorded with Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, the Kinks, the Small Faces, the Who, and many other legendary acts.

Lemmy once said, "Vic's strength was that he understood rock'n'roll. He wasn't like a lot of producers who rely on the readings from the meters on the desk; he was instinctive and he had the same sense of humour as me"—in other words that Maile was a 'feel' producer who knew what his clients wanted and how best to bring their strengths out.

The subsequent tour kicked off in Northern Ireland (Lemmy remembered, "Someone

**"By 1980, Motörhead had fought hard for every scrap of recognition they had received"**

which was a shame, as I could have done with a lift that night.

"To Lemmy, his drugs were like a prescriptive medication, and asking him for a line would have been like trying to cadge one of mum's cholesterol pills. We had bonded

climbed up and was hanging off the Bomber lighting rig") before moving down to Dublin, over to France, Germany, Belgium, and Italy, and then returning to the UK. At a Stafford show held at the town's Bingley Hall, Lemmy met *Sounds* writer Pete Makowski, who later recalled in *Classic Rock*: "My encounter was during the infamous Bingley Hall Show during the Bomber tour.

I must state at this point [that] in all the years I've known him, Lemmy has never offered me one grain of sulphate [speed] or any other narcotic,

**Lemmy, Philthy, Eddie: No matter what anyone says, only they could have made *Ace Of Spades*.**







due to the fact that I was going out with a former stripper girlfriend of his, and he would always, always greet me with some kind of lethal alcoholic concoction. Feeling worse for wear and a little queasy, I lunged for the pint glass he offered, and gulped it back, not realizing that it was pure Southern Comfort, not the most digestible of drinks at the best of times.”

Makowski soon realized his error: “Going green at the gills, I stupidly followed Lemmy’s instructions to ‘finish the bastard off’ and then ran in search of the nearest toilet. Unfortunately this meant traipsing up some concrete stairs, which were coated with perspiration of a few thousand headbangers, which had formed a noxious vaporous cloud on the ceiling and now trickled to the ground. It was inevitable that before I managed to reach my destination, I would slip and tumble backwards, to the soundtrack of Lemmy’s uncontrollable cackling...”

1981 was the year in which Motörhead were given their first taste of major success. Well, ‘given’ may not be the right word: The band had fought hard for every scrap of recognition they received, and the chart success which awaited them was only achieved through months and years of back-breaking live shows. “Tours really blur after a while,” said Lemmy a few years later. “But every tour’s good, as long as you’re not crippled!”

The ‘crippled’ reference was made with good reason, as at one show at the Ulster Hall in Belfast this year, Motörhead’s perennially accident-prone drummer Phil ‘Philthy’ Taylor managed to break his neck.

As he recalled, “It was after the gig in Belfast and we were all drinking up till 5.30am, and as the last of the broilers left and there was only drunken men left, we decided to mess about”. Messing about consisted of Philthy plus a drunken local attempting to lift each other off the ground. Why? Why not?

“This guy picked me up,” recalled Philthy, “overbalanced and fell backwards, and I landed on my head. And very lucky I was indeed. Good job Lem was there though, he knew what to do.” Interestingly, he didn’t specify what Lemmy did to help him: We can only assume that an ambulance was called and the drummer patched up. At a reunion decades later, Philthy showed Lemmy a large lump on the back of his neck: An outgrowth of calcium over the healed bone.

And so to bass—and when we last spoke to Lemmy around a decade ago, we took a trip (not that kind of trip) that included his early days as a guitar player in the psychedelic rock era, all the way up to his status as godfather of painfully heavy metal. Not that you ever referred to Motörhead as a heavy metal band in Lemmy’s presence... and what is more, readers with an aversion to strong language should probably look away now.



## LEMMY

**In the Rockin' Vickers and the Sam Gopal Dream, you were a guitarist. How come you joined Hawkwind as a bass player?**

I needed the job. It turned out that I was much better as a bass player than I'd ever been as a guitarist.

**You played bass already, presumably?**

No, I'd never picked one up in my life. I picked it up straight from scratch, on stage. Didn't even get to hear any of the songs first.

**Seriously?**

Yes. It was a free show on the back of a truck. I showed up for the guitar player's job but they decided not to get a new guitar player as Dave Brock was switching to lead. So they said, who plays bass? And keyboard player Dik Mik pointed to me and said, he does. I said, you cunt, I've never picked one up in my life! And then the bass player didn't show up and left his fuckin' gear in the van. Talk about stealing his gig, eh?

**How was it that you developed a melodic style so quickly?**

It was based on guitar. I found out about drone strings, where you let the A or the D string ring and play the melody on the G. It falls in very well behind the guitar. I used a lot of chords, too.

**Was it fun playing that droning, ringing style?**

Fuck yeah, it was. I mean, I was spaced out, wasn't I?

**But weren't you a speed freak while the other guys were on acid?**

Well, I used to take everything. I used to take their stuff, you know. They just didn't take mine.

**How do you get your famous overdriven bass sound?**

I just turn it up really loud and hit it really hard. No effects at all. I've never really used any pedals. I tried a wah-wah once but it doesn't really work with bass. It's pointless, isn't it? Effects always fuck up anyway, and then the feedback starts howling and you're standing there like a dickhead.

**What amps do you use?**

I've got two old Marshall JMP Super Bass 2s, with 4x15s and 4x12s on each side. I got the 4x15s in America. We went down to this guy's house and his wife showed us this summerhouse in the garden. We had to dig our way through all this furniture and shit and there were these two cabs with the covers on. She pulled the covers off and they were Marshalls from the 60s. They haven't made



4x15s for a long time. They were brand new, never been used, and I got the two of them for 400 bucks.

**What about EQ? You must have a lot of middle in your sound.**

Oh yes. I'll tell you the controls, left to right. Presence is at three o'clock. Bass is off. Middle is full. Treble is off. Volume at three o'clock.

**That must help with the overdrive.**

Oh yeah. It gives it a bit of a lift.

**In 2000, Rickenbacker produced a Lemmy signature bass. Did they approach you or did you go to them?**

They said, do you want to design a bass, and I said yes. I think they bit off more than they could chew, really.

**There are three pickups on there.**

Yes—Rickenbacker finally made a good pickup! The first Ricky I had, I replaced the neck pickup with one off a Thunderbird. Otherwise I used to use Bartolinis. The three-pickup combination works, that's what I'm interested in.

**Did you create the design for the carved oak-leaves on the walnut top?**

I'm not that good an artist, they got a professional wood-carver in. I drew it for them but I wouldn't say they went exactly by my design.

**Does it sound good?**

It does for me, yeah. It needs to stand plenty of punishment and I like a real discernable difference in the sound of the pickups, you know. I don't want three pickups that all sound the same, like they do on Fenders. And you certainly get that difference with this bass.

**Are you fussy about the weight and the balance?**

Well, it weighs nothing, it's light as a feather. I don't insist on a light bass, it just turned out that way,

it's great. I find Rickys useful for me because I'm a guitarist turned bass player, you know: I like the skinny neck, and I like the weird shape, too. It has to look right.

**Do you have other basses too?**

I used to have a Thunderbird. But the neck's a bit long on them, you have to be a fuckin' contortionist to play them. And I used to have an old Hopf bass when I first joined Hawkwind. They were real good.

**“I don't see the point in five-string bass unless you're bent on being a superstar...”**





**Have you ever dabbled with five- and six-string basses?**

No. I don't see what you'd use them for, unless you were bent on being a superstar, which I'm not.

**I asked Jack Bruce the same question.**  
Oh yeah? What did he say?

**He said that if you've got the extra strings, you just play them because they're there, whereas if you've only got four you're forced to be inventive.**

Exactly! It's much more fun. I played a Fender VI when they were around, but I never really fancied it much. I did try one of the Rickenbacker eight-strings, though. I thought it was fuckin' horrible. It had a neck like a tree trunk. Tell you what I have got—one of those Hagstrom eight-string basses, the same one that Jimi Hendrix had. And that's really good. It's much better than any of the others.

**Do you ever write songs on bass?**

Well, it's very hard, that. You sound like a twat sitting there on your own. The only song I wrote on bass was 'Iron Fist'. Otherwise it's mostly on acoustic guitar.

**Can you read music?**

No. What for? I'm in a rock'n'roll band, not a fuckin' orchestra.

**Did you ever play slap bass?**

No, not really. I can make it recognizable, but it's not really my thing.

**When you were a guitarist, who influenced you?**

Clapton, of course. And Beck. But I could never do that shit, I was no good. A really fuckin' indifferent guitarist. I was lucky I found bass.

**People admire your bass playing.**

They're quite right. I think I'm original, at least. I think I play like nobody else does. I always wanted to be John Entwistle, but since that place was taken, I became a lesser version. Entwistle was the best bass player on the face of the earth. He was the best for me, no contest. He was so in command of his instrument. You never saw him flicker. Never a bum note that I ever heard. And he was so fast, both hands going like hell. The bass solo in 'My Generation', you still tie yourself in knots trying to do it now. You can work it out, but it was another thing thinking it up. And that was back in 1964.

**Who else did you admire?**

I liked Carol Kaye. She was a housewife who used to do all the Motown stuff. She was great, a fuckin' outstanding woman. She'd clock out of the house in the morning, play a bit of bass and then clock back in for teatime and feed the kids. Fuckin' amazing!

**How about Flea?**

I think he's very good indeed. Excellent. He's an innovator and what he does stands out.

**Jaco Pastorius?**

Well, for me that's dilettantism. You can only do so much soloing. It's like the Joe Satriani and Steve Vai albums: I mean, I like a good solo, but not for the whole fuckin' album. I like songs with verses at each end.

**But 'Portrait Of Tracy' was amazing. All those harmonics.**

Oh, fuckin' hell. Boring! That's all very well, but it's like, one more time, look at what I can do. It's kind of tedious.

**When you play, you hit the string with the pick quite close to the neck pickup.**

Yes, I use the arm rest. I play around that, the Arc de Triomphe. The Bridge Of Sighs.

**Don't the strings flap a bit when you hit them there?**

Well, I don't use small-gauge strings.



**WIN!**

Take home BMG's new *Ace Of Spades* box set by answering this question:

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**B** 'Fast' Eddie Clarke  
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**“What would I read music for? I play in a rock'n'roll band, not a f\*\*\*ing orchestra!”**

I'm a great believer that there should be heavy-gauge, medium, and light, and that's all, otherwise it's just too fuckin' confusing. There are so many different bloody gauges, and people use all the wrong strings all the time. Like when Clapton came out with the banjo fifth tuning. You don't remember that, do you? You could only get one gauge in them days—medium, ha ha!—so to get more bend, Clapton used a banjo fifth string as a guitar first. They lasted a damn sight longer than these light-gauge strings they give you now. I don't really mind what make of strings I use as long as they've got some growl to 'em. I don't give a shit. I come from that generation

when you used what you had. There was none of this, oh, I must have these strings or I can't go on stage. You know? Bollocks to that.

**Motörhead has a huge guitar sound. How do you stop the bass getting lost in the mix?**

Well, you see I don't mind the bass getting lost, because I think a band should sound like three or four guys playing together. It shouldn't sound like four fuckin' solo instruments. I don't understand why you'd want to hear just one instrument. I just see the wall, I don't see the bricks on their own. I like it to sound like a band, like the Beatles always did. Even Hendrix, you couldn't tell what the fuck was going on with him. There'd be so many guitars on there. I like to hear a band, that's the idea of being in a band. You play together. ■





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# WILL POWER

Austin-based **Bonnie Whitmore** returns with a bass-packed new album—and some serious food for thought...

**“**I started out in a family band when I was about eight years old, so I didn’t know who any bass players were,” says Bonnie Whitmore, whose new album *Last Will And Testament* is available now. “My dad wanted a bass player, so that was the instrument that I got. As I grew older, I became aware of Paul McCartney and Carol Kaye, of course, but then also Kim Deal of the Pixies.”

For the last 20 years, Whitmore has accompanied a wide range of Americana musicians, including Hayes Carll, John Moreland, Eliza Gilkyson and Butch Hancock, while writing and recording her own material. Asked why she’s releasing *Last Will And Testament* now, she explains “It seems like a perfect storm right now, and this record needed to come out because of that. It’s exactly where it’s supposed to be, and at the right time.”

“I’ve been hanging on to some of these songs for a while,” she adds. “I wanted to launch into separate topics that I think are

worth discussing. There’s so much anger and frustration that people feel, and I’m interested in finding out where that comes from.”

Whitmore’s new songs reference important subjects—gun violence and rape among them, in ‘Time To Shoot’ and ‘Asked For It’ respectively. “I never thought of the word ‘feminist’ as a dirty word, but it’s certainly been through the wringer over the past couple of decades,” she says. “Right now, I think we’re seeing the apex of toxic masculinity at its finest. I wrote my song ‘Asked For It’

before the #metoo movement, and the first couple of times I played it, it felt like the air was being sucked out of the room. People were not ready to be faced with that kind of

**“There’s so much anger and frustration in people. I’m interested in where that comes from”**

conversation, but the #metoo movement has definitely given it the space where people are wanting something that they can hold to. Awareness can bring forth change, that’s what I believe.”

She continues: “Women’s empowerment was such a huge part of the Nineties, with Lilith Fair and all these amazing women who

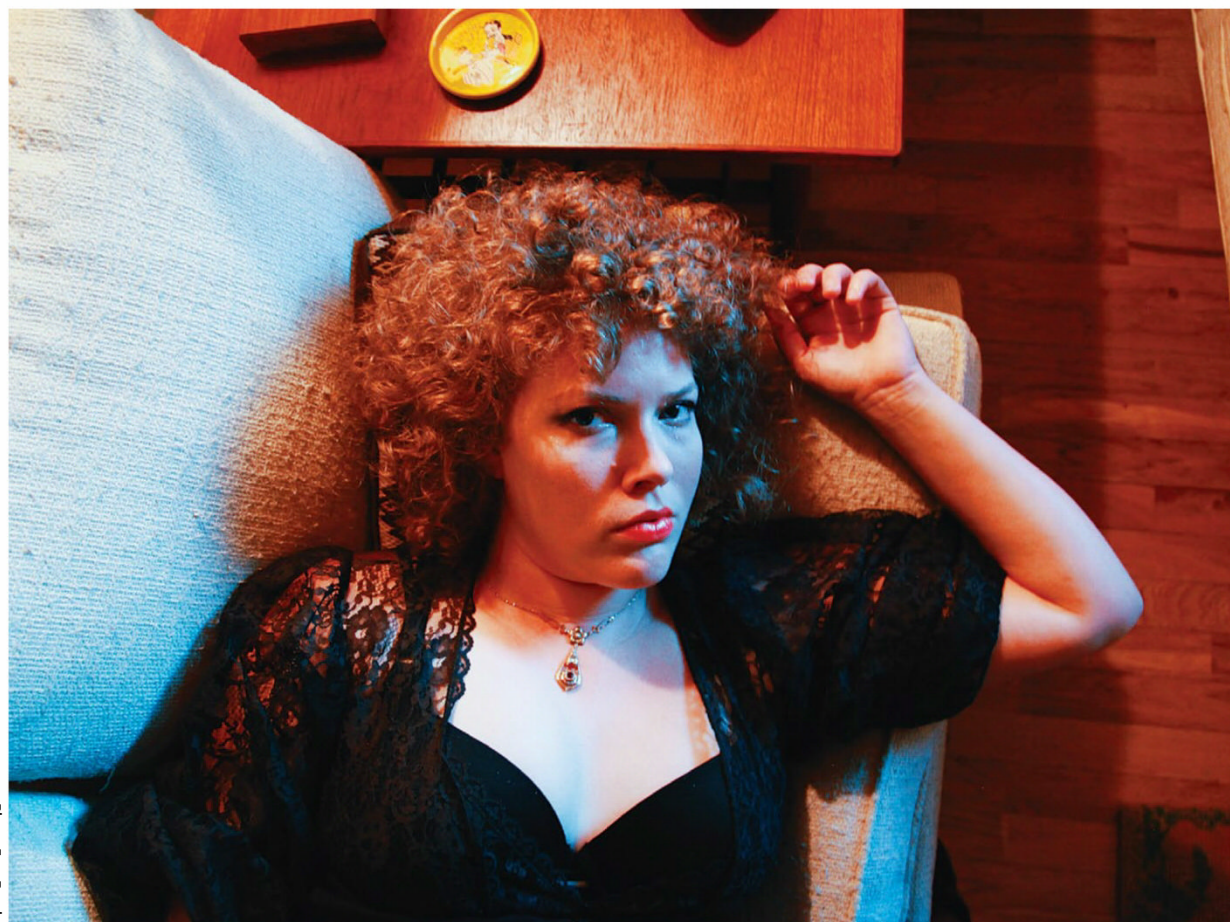


Photo: Eryn Brooker

were playing in a popular forum—and we watched it all be dismantled and taken away. The role models for women that were available from that point on were mostly young women that were on the Disney channel and pageantry-style shows. For me, I was seeing how that affected the quality of the music, and it put me in the position of being in fringe music. The popular position wasn’t where I was gravitating to any more.”

*Last Will And Testament* underlines these themes with a variety of weighty bass tones, explains Whitmore. “There’s a custom P-Bass that was designed by Gamble Guitar, who does a wonderful job of building vintage-style basses. My standby is a Gibson lawsuit-era bass from the Seventies. It’s an Electra but it looks exactly like a EB-3. That’s my go-to bass. Another bass is







a Hofner, owned by Scott Davis, who got it when he was out touring in Germany—it's a beautiful violin bass and one of my favorites to play. The last one is an eight-string Hagstrom. I like to have it in the mix to fill the gaps."

"I also borrowed a vintage Rickenbacker with the checkerboard inlay; it was my bass guru's instrument. His name was George Reiff, who toured with the Dixie Chicks, and he passed away in 2017. It's a beautiful bass, and I always need to have a little bit of George on my records. He used to let me go through his basses and play the one that I

liked best, which suited me because I used to get 'little lady'—d a lot when I went into music stores.

"We mostly recorded straight into the dock, although there was a bass amp in the studio too. We used an awesome distortion pedal, close to a Big Muff: It's a custom one that

I got in Alabama. It doesn't cut the low end as bad, and it's definitely ornery. I also used a tremolo pedal and speeded it up and slowed it down. I use D'Addario flatwounds and their baritone strings on the eight-string, because there's not really a string pack for them."

**"Women's empowerment was such a huge part of the Nineties, and we watched it all be dismantled and taken away"**

Vegetarians, beware—Whitmore has an unusual, homegrown approach to getting a treble-free tone. "I'm one of those bassists who never changes their strings, and when I do have to change them, I rub bacon fat on them to deaden them. The deader the strings the better, for me. Of course, I clean the bacon grease off afterwards. Some people actually put their strings in the fry, with heat, but I can't quite wrap my head around that idea..."

She concludes: "I definitely want an audience that is open to listening. I know nobody's going to play my CD in clubs and grind their asses to it, and that's okay. I love that music, but it's not the music that I create. I think my audience is more mature—so it would be great to expand that out to younger groups of people, too." ■

Info: [www.bonni whitmore.com](http://www.bonni whitmore.com)



# SCHOOL'S IN...

...says bassist  
extraordinaire  
**Damian Erskine** as  
he launches his new  
bass education portal

**D**amian Erskine is a career bassist, educator, and columnist, having played with a huge range of musicians, primarily from the jazz world. He's an adjunct professor at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon and—viruses permitting—regularly travels abroad to teach. He has performed at many clinics and written for several print and online publications, including this one, with a long-running series at No Treble coming to a close last year after over 500 instalments. Erskine has recently launched the website BassEducation.com, an online school for anyone interested in beginning or developing skills as a bassist. We caught up with him for a peek into his never-more-busy world...

**Damian, was the launch of Bass Education inspired by the current pandemic?**

It had been in the back of my mind for well over a dozen years, but it was the pandemic and the cancelation of all my tours and the loss of all my work that finally instigated the process. I started Bass Education in March and I launched it in May. It's definitely been a labor of love, but I've got a lot of great feedback from members and people seem to get a lot out of it, so I keep energized and inspired to keep it going.

**You've kept membership prices at reasonable levels, which is great to see.**

I've always been a big proponent of supporting the bass community. I've taught jazz workshops for Jazz Education Abroad, where we'd go to different countries like China and Thailand and Lebanon. One of the things I was struck by was always how many people are hungry for music education, but don't have the means to access it. I want to keep the pricing affordable for everyone.

**Online bass education is a saturated market. Did that thought ever deter you?**

It was definitely part of the equation. When I first thought about doing it, it wasn't







a saturated market, but it became one as time passed—and yes, that was something of a deterrent. But back in March this year, I figured I had all the time in the world, so that was no longer an excuse, and I thought ‘There’s a lot of people who enjoy the specific way that I teach things’. It’s rather like my bass playing; if I always compared myself to Victor Wooten and Jaco Pastorius, I would probably have never picked up the bass. The same thing is true if I think ‘How could this possibly compete with Scott’s Bass Lessons?’ or something like that: In that case, I probably would never have built this site. Like with my bass playing, I just do my own thing as best as I can, and put my energy into it, and it’ll do what it’ll do.

**There’s still a lot of room for different approaches, of course.**

Yes, there’s room for everybody, and it’s a global market, which was also part of my approach to pricing. If this thing can pay for itself and make a few bucks on top of it, but more people have access to it, it’s a good thing. There’s no lack of free instruction online, but one of my primary objectives with this site is to remain available and accessible to all students. I tell everybody that signs up, ‘If you have a question, let me know’. I want to be involved in everybody’s process, and I think that one-on-one is generally lacking when it comes to online information.

**Presumably a lot of bassists know who you are through your long-running column at No Treble.**

Yes, that was a big boon, and a lot of fun. I stopped doing it in 2019, simply because I’d been doing it for so long. I’d written 500 or so weekly columns, and I’d started running out of things to talk about. It engaged me with a large part of the bass community, and that’s certainly helped with Bass Education.

**What tips would you give a prospective student of bass?**

First, never be afraid to ask questions—there are no dumb questions. Engage with your teacher or your fellow students, and find out what you need to know. Also, we all started at the same place: On day one, none of us knew anything. Information is best absorbed in bite-sized chunks, so have an idea of what you want to work on and what your weaknesses are, and take those things one by one. Keep your head down and keep working, and you’ll be surprised at how fast and how well you learn. It takes longer than you want, but it goes quicker than you think.

**“Don’t distract yourself with getting gear to solve all your problems. Make what you have work”**

**Definitely. Should people worry about getting the right bass gear?**

No. Don’t distract yourself with getting gear that you think will solve all your problems: Instead, make what you have work. Lesser gear often forces you to come up with solutions to problems—that’s how my right-hand technique started. Worry about the gear later. Finally, our role as bass players is to be the bridge between the drummer and the rest of the band, so it’s crucial to spend time on rhythm. We should really learn how to think like drummers.

**On the subject of gear, tell us about the basses you use.**

I play a signature Skjold bass, the Whaleback: I was actually the first Skjold endorser, and I’ve been with Aguilar for a long time too. I also use D’Addario strings, Reunion Blues gigbags, 1964 in-ears, GruvGear straps, and various great products from MXR, RMI, Two Notes and A-Designs Audio. I’m very blessed in that I’m endorsed by the companies I’d be playing anyway. Pete Skjold is a wizard—he excels at getting to know what you really want. He can turn my dumb bass-player speak into action: when I tell him that I want this thing to sound like chocolate raindrops or something, he knows exactly what I’m talking about, and he makes it happen.

**You’re also an author—tell us about your books.**

The first one was *Right Hand Drive*, which focused on the use of the thumb in my plucking technique, and the second was *The Improviser’s Path*, which was about jazz harmony as I came to understand it. I’m considering a coffee-table book which compiles my No Treble columns, but it’s on the back burner while I focus on Bass Education.

**So, what’s next for you?**

My goal right now is to keep developing the functional content and slowly build it until the membership is large enough so that I can

afford to hire a web guru to design the site of my dreams, because right now I’m doing everything. I enjoy being part of my own process: Everything I’ve done so far has been self-published and self-released. I’m building the site, editing the video, and all that stuff, although I’m happy with the way it’s turning out. It’s great so far. I’m looking forward to what the future brings. ■

Info: [www.basseducation.com](http://www.basseducation.com)





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| <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Aguilar</td> <td>Darkglass</td> <td>EBS</td> <td>F Bass</td> <td>Gallien Krueger</td> <td>Lakland</td> <td>MusicMan</td> <td>Spector</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Alembic</td> <td>Demeter</td> <td>Eminence</td> <td>Fender</td> <td>Godin</td> <td>Mesa Boogie</td> <td>NS Design</td> <td>SunCoast</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bag End</td> <td>Dingwall</td> <td>Ernie Ball</td> <td>G &amp; L</td> <td>Hofner</td> <td>MTD</td> <td>Phil Jones</td> <td>Tech 21</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bergantino</td> <td>DNA</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>Sadowsky</td> <td>Trace Elliot</td> </tr> <tr> <td>BSX EUB</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>Yamaha</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>Zon</td> </tr> </table> | Aguilar   | Darkglass  | EBS    | F Bass          | Gallien Krueger | Lakland    | MusicMan     | Spector | Alembic | Demeter | Eminence | Fender | Godin | Mesa Boogie | NS Design | SunCoast | Bag End | Dingwall | Ernie Ball | G & L | Hofner | MTD | Phil Jones | Tech 21 | Bergantino | DNA |  |  |  |  | Sadowsky | Trace Elliot | BSX EUB |  |  |  |  |  |  | Yamaha |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Zon |
| Aguilar                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Darkglass | EBS        | F Bass | Gallien Krueger | Lakland         | MusicMan   | Spector      |         |         |         |          |        |       |             |           |          |         |          |            |       |        |     |            |         |            |     |  |  |  |  |          |              |         |  |  |  |  |  |  |        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |     |
| Alembic                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Demeter   | Eminence   | Fender | Godin           | Mesa Boogie     | NS Design  | SunCoast     |         |         |         |          |        |       |             |           |          |         |          |            |       |        |     |            |         |            |     |  |  |  |  |          |              |         |  |  |  |  |  |  |        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |     |
| Bag End                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Dingwall  | Ernie Ball | G & L  | Hofner          | MTD             | Phil Jones | Tech 21      |         |         |         |          |        |       |             |           |          |         |          |            |       |        |     |            |         |            |     |  |  |  |  |          |              |         |  |  |  |  |  |  |        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |     |
| Bergantino                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | DNA       |            |        |                 |                 | Sadowsky   | Trace Elliot |         |         |         |          |        |       |             |           |          |         |          |            |       |        |     |            |         |            |     |  |  |  |  |          |              |         |  |  |  |  |  |  |        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |     |
| BSX EUB                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |           |            |        |                 |                 |            | Yamaha       |         |         |         |          |        |       |             |           |          |         |          |            |       |        |     |            |         |            |     |  |  |  |  |          |              |         |  |  |  |  |  |  |        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |     |
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# FENDER

## 60th Anniversary Jazz

FENDER  
[www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com)

Now a sexagenarian, is the Jazz Bass still sexy? Chris Gill takes this Sixties-inspired model for a swing

**T**he Fender Jazz Bass is celebrating its 60th birthday this year, but it isn't making any retirement plans soon, as it remains as vital, popular, and essential as ever. In celebration of this milestone, Fender is offering the 60th Anniversary Jazz as a limited production run. This commemorative model is not a reproduction of any particular vintage Jazz, but rather a hybrid of sorts that combines several features from throughout the Sixties. Could this be the ultimate bass for the Sixties-style J-Bass aficionado?

### **Build Quality**

Two features that prominently draw attention are the Arctic Pearl gloss nitrocellulose lacquer finish on the body and headstock face, and the





\$2,199.99

pair of concentric control knobs. The finish exudes a silver glow under low light, with sparkling metallic flakes catching the eye under brighter spotlights. The stacked concentric volume and tone knobs for each pickup—a beloved, but short-lived configuration that initially lasted from the model's 1960 debut until late 1961—provide a wider range of tones than the volume/volume/tone setup that replaced it. The knurled dome knobs for the volume controls turn with a smooth silky feel, while the black knurled outer-ring tone controls click into 11 distinct positions.

Closer examination reveals Sixties-style pickup placement where the Pure Vintage '62 Single-Coil Jazz Bass pickups are positioned 3.5 inches apart, with the bridge pickup placed further away from the bridge than

the Seventies-style positioning. The dot-inlay rosewood fingerboard has single-ply binding—a feature introduced in 1965—and the four-saddle Vintage-Style bridge has threaded steel saddles that facilitate custom string spacing. Other period-correct details include a finger rest, or 'tug bar', mounted below the G string, a third strap button on the back of the headstock, and Pure Vintage reverse open-gear tuners with small clover-shaped keys. One major historical exception is that individual adjustable felt string mutes and the later-style mute inside the bridge pickup cover are missing... not that anyone is going to miss them.

Befitting an instrument in the \$2,000-plus price range, the construction is immaculate. The Vintage Tall frets are smoothly



A slim, slinky feel and fast playability... The neck pocket is airtight, providing optimal neck-to-body contact for sustain and dynamic response. Even a .001-inch feeler gauge couldn't fit between the neck and body joint

rounded and polished with no protruding or sharp edges, and the slots for the 1.5-inch-wide nut are filed to ideal widths and depths to firmly anchor the strings and maintain solid tuning without binding or pinging when adjusting tuners. The neck pocket is airtight, providing optimal neck-to-body contact for sustain and dynamic response. Even a .001-inch feeler gauge couldn't fit between the neck and body joint.

### Sounds And Playability

Thanks to its Sixties-style U-shape profile and 7.25-inch radius, the neck feels notably rounder and heftier than most modern necks, but it still maintains the slim, slinky feel and fast playability that has made the Jazz a favorite of flamboyant bassists from Larry Graham, Jaco, and John Entwistle, to Geddy Lee, and Flea. The Vintage Tall frets are a good complement to this rounder neck style, providing accurate intonation and ample contact surface for bending notes. I noticed very little difference in playing feel between these frets and the wider, flatter frets on my '71 Jazz. A bigger issue for modern players is the pickup covers and tug bar that limit and inhibit right hand playing positions, but this problem is easily fixed in a few seconds with a screwdriver.

The alder body, maple neck with rosewood fingerboard, bone nut, steel saddles, and stock .045-.105 gauge nickel-

plated steel strings all combine to deliver an alluring combination of low-end punch, growling mids, treble bite, and full-bodied sustain. The Pure Vintage '62 Single-Coil Jazz Bass pickups with resistance measuring 7.11k ohms (bridge) and 6.41k ohms (neck) enhance these attributes with crisp articulation, detail and low noise, particularly with both pickups at full volume—where they deliver true humbucking performance.

Having individual tone controls for each pickup is a huge advantage over the more-common post-1961 master tone circuit, allowing bassists to tame the bridge pickup's bite by backing down its tone slightly while maintaining the full-on bark of the neck pickup with its tone at full treble. Even better is backing down the neck's tone for a deep, round wallop, while keeping the bridge bright to maintain percussive attack ideal for slap playing that packs extra punch.

### Conclusion

The 60th Anniversary Jazz is a worthy celebration of an instrument that truly changed the role of the electric bass. For players who prefer Sixties features it's the ultimate greatest-hits package, but it also offers impressive tonal variety and playability to please more modern stylists.

#### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

- Price | \$2,199.99
- Made In | USA
- Body | Alder
- Neck | Maple, 34" scale, glass nitrocellulose lacquer finish
- Neck Joint | Bolt-on, four-bolt attachment
- Nut Width | 1.5" / 38mm
- Fingerboard | Rosewood
- Frets | 20, Vintage Tall
- Pickups | Fender Pure Vintage '62 Single-Coil Jazz Bass x 2
- Electronics | Passive
- Controls | Volume/Tone Neck, Volume/Tone Bridge (concentric)
- Hardware | Nickel-chrome hardware, four-saddle vintage-style bridge with threaded steel saddles, Pure Vintage reverse open-gear machine heads
- Weight | 9.6 lbs
- Case/gig bag included | Commemorative deluxe hardshell case
- Left-hand option available | No

#### WHAT WE THINK

- Plus | Tonal variety, outstanding playability
- Minus | Unnecessary pickup covers, tug bar, and headstock strap button
- Overall | Stellar sounds and style; worth the extra expense

#### BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

VALUE

★★★★★☆☆☆☆







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# YAMAHA

## SLB300 Silent Bass

YAMAHA  
www.yamaha.com

\$4,575  
[MSRP]

An electric  
upright that  
assembles  
in 30 seconds?  
Jon Thorne  
sets his  
stopwatch...

**T**he evolution of the electric upright bass, or EUB, has tended since the Nineties towards hybrid instruments which attempt to satisfy the middle ground between double and electric bass players. With this new Silent Bass, Yamaha's aim is clearly to develop an instrument that replicates the exact experience of playing a real double bass, with a clear view to reproducing its sound as closely as possible. Simultaneously, the SLB300 may also provide valuable solutions to some of the travel problems facing the modern player. Let's unpack it and see.

### Build Quality

My initial impressions upon first assembling and playing this bass acoustically were extremely positive. Constructing the bass straight out of the case is a very simple task—and yes, it can be done very quickly, depending on your environment. Can it be done in 30 seconds, as Yamaha claim? I was being very careful not to damage the instrument, so for me it was a minute or two.

The shoulder brace is the best I've come across on an EUB. Two side pieces that represent the upper bouts fold out and are fixed into place when bolted on at the top of the body. When this leans









## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

**Price** | \$4,575 MSRP

**Made In** | Japan

**Color** | Brown

**Body** | Spruce and mahogany

**Frame** | Beech, detachable

**Neck** | Maple, 41" scale

**Fingerboard** | Rosewood

**Pickup** | Piezo

**Controls** | Volume, active treble and bass controls, bypass selector, blend control, mic type selector

**Hardware** | Wormgear machine heads, reverse ebony tailpiece

**Weight** | 15 lb 14 oz

**Case/gig bag included?** |

Yes, with mute and allen wrench

## WHAT WE THINK

**Plus** | Portable, playable, authentic

**Minus** | Small dimensions may not suit everyone

**Overall** | Tons of fun, if you're seeking a particular aesthetic

## BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★

VALUE

★★★★★★★★★

against you, this gives it a genuinely realistic feel, just like a double bass. It feels completely stable, sitting perfectly with good balance. There is none of the feeling that you're holding a long neck with no real sense of where the body is for reference. It also gives the correct playing tension under both the left and right hand, without you having to hold the bass in position—a rare and valuable asset.

The SLB has a very playable standard 41.75" string length. The neck feels good for all left-hand transitioning. I would like it to be a little thinner, but a luthier could easily fix this for me. The bass comes with standard machine heads, and although these are adequate, I would prefer a higher-quality alternative with finer gearing, such as an Irving Sloane product.

The end pin fits into the body at an angle, a great idea that stops rotation and makes the bass feel stable. It fixes into the bass with an adjustable tightener that goes straight onto the pin—it has no grooves into which to fix it, which is a slight concern. As it's the weakest point

of any EUB, I would personally prefer an end pin with a denser mass in the metal that wouldn't bend at the joint under stress, as I think this one may do over time. Pin slipping is unlikely to happen on a jazz or classical gig, but were I to use it in my band Lamb, where I often move around energetically, putting extra pressure on the pin, this could be an issue. I would prefer to fix it into the bass in a way that completely avoids it loosening and slipping into the instrument.

On a practical note, the SLB has an easily accessible cavity for its AA batteries. We're told to expect 26 to 32 hours of battery life, which seems quite short to me, so make sure you carry spares.

## Sounds And Playability

On playing the bass acoustically, I was struck by its superb resonance. You can feel the notes through your body, and where other EUBs can often sound and feel simply like a giant electric fretless, this bass satisfies the desire for the feel of a real double bass. The sound is





greatly enhanced by a good-quality bridge and a decent, dense fingerboard. It has a full and rich low end thanks to an acoustic chamber that supplies a pleasingly loud body volume when unplugged. The bridge is adjustable, so setting up your desired action is quick and easy.

Plugged in, the bass uses a powered electronic system that simulates the sound of three different studio microphones. You can adjust your sound by selecting one of these and blending it with the treble and bass controls, giving you a wide range of tones for different musical situations. The blend can be adjusted between the direct pickup output, with no mic simulation to full microphone simulation.

Here, though, is where I found it difficult to achieve my desired tone when playing pizzicato. With the EQ set flat on my amp, I found the tones to be too nasal for my taste. This is a common problem with EUBs: My feeling is that by using a combination of a high-quality preamp such as a Grace Felix and a different hybrid string such as Evah

Pirazzi—rather than the D’Addario Helicores that this bass comes with—you would get a richer, woody amplified tone.

This bass bows extremely well, with an even sound in all registers across the full range of the fingerboard. I enjoyed experimenting with its natural sound by running it through various effects including reverb, delay, chorus, and sub-harmonics. It tracked these well and could prove to be a great bass to use in louder electronic or rock bands. It would be interesting to see how well you could drive the sound through a big PA at larger venues and festivals.

## Conclusion

As a substitute for an upright, the SLB300 would work well in both a classical and a jazz context. It feels outstanding in your hands and plays very much as a double bass should. Though a large investment, it is a very impressive leap forward in the progression of this type of instrument — and in some respects, it is the finest EUB I’ve played. ■





# JACKSON

## Minion JS1X

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SQUIER  
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# SQUIER

## Mini Precision

Small but perfectly-formed, these affordable bass guitars bring a touch of fun-sized charm to the table—but can they compete with their full-grown siblings, asks  
Joel McIver

**R**egular readers will know that in recent years we've reviewed increasing numbers of short-scale basses, not just because we think they're cute but because they represent a very real, practical shift in players' and manufacturers' thinking. There's a large number of emerging young players with small hands; likewise, there is a greater number of female bassists, a welcome—and long overdue—development in our world; there's a growing concern about the world's wood stocks; and there seems to be a growing reluctance among airline check-in staff to allow full-sized bass guitars on planes as carry-on luggage. (I admit this last point is based on anecdotal evidence rather than hard data, so if you happen to own a bass-friendly airline, don't sue me.)

The next logical step may be for luthiers to invest their time and energy into smaller-bodied bass guitars like the two we have here, sent over for review by Fender. Light of weight and short of scale—





£175  
£149

significantly so; these both measure up at a mere 28.6"—both are aimed squarely at the new, young, and/or financially challenged bass player. In fact, they're both so budget-priced that we're immediately suspicious about their ability to make a decent sound or play without serious effort, so let's plug them in and see. There's no point in producing an affordable instrument if it sounds terrible, after all.

## Build Quality

Aesthetically, there's no getting away from the fact that the Jackson Minion—a reduced-version of the long-standing Concert model—is a heavy metal bass, thanks to its pointy headstock. Some bassists love its droopy look, enough in fact to label it with the overused adjective 'iconic'; others can't stand it, and why not? The world would be tedious if we all had the same tastes.

Assuming you like the 'poke your annoying singer in the back' look of this little bass, you probably won't be bothered one way or the other

by the serviceable but unexciting materials from which it's made. The body is poplar, and the bolt-on neck is the expected maple, although it does boast graphite reinforcement rods, which is impressive at this price point. The fingerboard is amaranth, which the internets tell me is a South American wood also known as purpleheart, and which feels perfectly solid beneath the fingers.

We have 22 frets, P and J pickups—crammed rather close together, given the small body—and the expected volumes and tone. Everything moves as it should, from the tuners to the control pots, with no sense of cheapness whatsoever. How they've pulled this off at this price, I have no idea.

You can't quite say the same about the Squier Mini Precision, although it's around 20 percent cheaper than its headbanging sister, which may have something to do with its slightly insubstantial feel. It's a P-Bass in form, from the split single-coil





pickup, single volume and tone, and C-shaped neck profile, but there's a lightweight feel to details such as the machine heads. Mind you, what do you expect at this price? Furthermore, plugged in and played, the Mini P has an unexpected secret weapon...

## Sounds And Playability

...That weapon is its neck. At this price, essentially the equivalent of a couple of tyres for your band van, the Squier has no right to possess a neck as playable as this one. Smooth and welcoming but not so frictionless that you can't do your job, it's the nicest chunk of maple we've come up against at this price point for some time.

This is useful, because—as with the Jackson—the scale is five inches and counting shorter than the full-scale bass you normally play, so accurate finger placement above, say, the sixth fret requires some attention. A slick neck like this one helps you to get that right, although you'll need to take care until you've played for a couple of hours and you're at home with these petite scale dimensions.

In every other way, the Squier feels adequate rather than astounding, but complaining about that fact would be inappropriate because the thing is so damn cheap. The tones don't compare with those of a full-sized P-Bass, but they're not feeble by any means. There's a certain amount of bottom end and a rather lesser dose of top, but





#### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

**Squier Mini Precision**  
**Price** | \$189  
**Made In** | Indonesia  
**Body** | Poplar  
**Neck** | Maple, 28.6" scale  
**Neck Joint** | Bolt-on  
**Fingerboard** | Indian Laurel, 20 frets  
**Pickups** | Split Single-Coil Precision  
**Controls** | Volume, tone  
**Hardware** | Squier tuners and bridge  
**Weight** | 8.35 lbs  
**Case/gig bag included** | No  
**Left-hand option available** | No

#### WHAT WE THINK

**Plus** | Portable, affordable, fun  
**Minus** | Hardware inevitably feels insubstantial  
**Overall** | At this price, who's complaining?  
 A great way into Fender

#### BP RATING

**BUILD QUALITY**  
 ★★★★★★☆☆  
**SOUND QUALITY**  
 ★★★★★★☆☆  
**VALUE**  
 ★★★★★★☆☆

#### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

**Jackson Minion JS1X**  
**Price** | \$189.99  
**Made In** | USA  
**Body** | Poplar  
**Neck** | Maple, 28.6" scale  
**Neck Joint** | Bolt-on  
**Fingerboard** | Amaranth, 22 frets  
**Pickups** | Jackson P-style neck, J-style bridge  
**Controls** | Volume, volume, tone  
**Hardware** | Nickel-chrome hardware, Jackson tuners and bridge  
**Weight** 6.2 lbs  
**Case/gig bag included** | No  
**Left-hand option available** | No

#### WHAT WE THINK

**Plus** | Above-average tones for its size; very playable  
**Minus** | None  
**Overall** | The best mini-bass we've tested so far

#### BP RATING

**BUILD QUALITY**  
 ★★★★★★☆☆  
**SOUND QUALITY**  
 ★★★★★★☆☆  
**VALUE**  
 ★★★★★★☆☆

that's nothing that a decent preamp won't fix—and you wouldn't choose this bass if extreme tones were what you were looking for, anyway. The Mini P is an acceptable instrument with a better-than-average neck and a trifling pricetag—it does the job that it's designed to do.

The Jackson is significantly better, thanks to its extra pickup. That 1.5" nut width will require some care when you're playing, but after a session or two you'll feel at home with it. The Concert series has always been a shredder-friendly bass anyway, and the neck profile is just as forgiving when reduced down to the Minion's size. There's a fairly big low-end response, and while the mids and top end can

hardly compete with the thunder and crackle of the full-sized active version, no-one expects that they should. Try slapping and tapping, just for fun—with this scale size, you'll need pro levels of accuracy.

## Conclusion

Go small with our full recommendations. Save money, save aggravation at the airport, and save the world's rainforests while you're at it, but bear in mind that these small instruments require a slightly different mindset and an adapted technique. You may even find that your full-sized basses feel a bit cumbersome when you go back to them. Food for thought, right? ■



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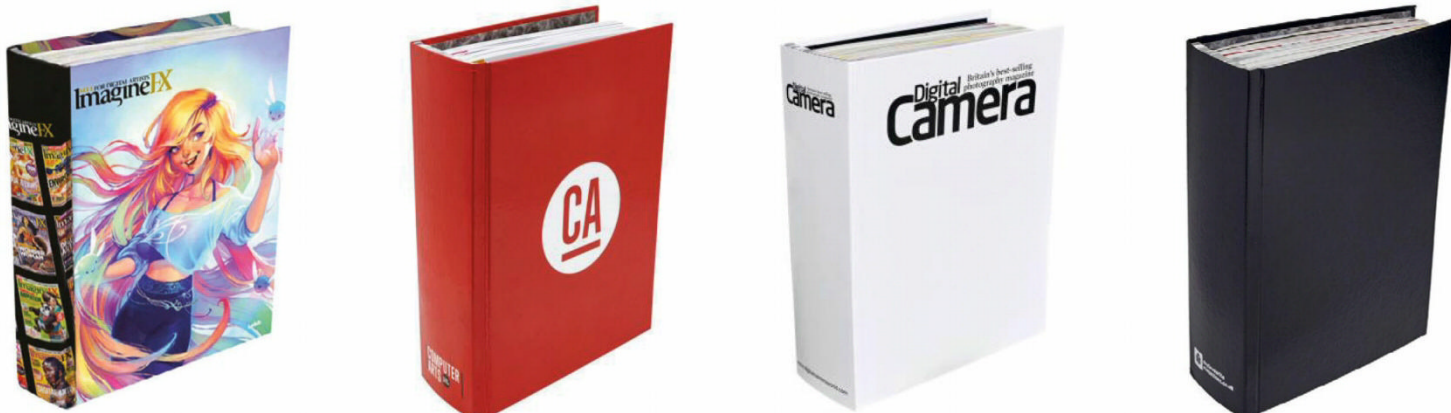
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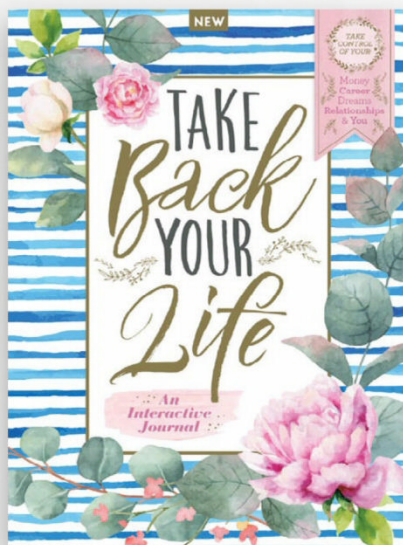
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**76**

## RYAN MADORA

**Dig into your favorite bass parts... and discover treasure!**

Ryan Madora is one of Nashville's most sought-after touring and session bassists. Recent touring and session credits include Robben Ford, Kyshona Armstrong, and her instrumental trio, The Interludes. For the past five years, she has served as musical director for Bobby Bones and has played with Garth Brooks, Darius Rucker, and Carrie Underwood. In addition to instructing at Nashville's campus of Musician's Institute, Ryan has taught at Gerald Veasley's Bass Boot Camp, Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp, and at universities across the USA. She has contributed columns to No Treble for over a decade and in 2019, published her first book, *Bass Players To Know: Learning From The Greats*. Ryan offers online education at TrueFire and through her website.

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## STEVE LAWSON

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Steve Lawson is the UK's most celebrated solo bass guitarist. Across more than two decades of touring, and a huge catalog of solo and collaborative albums, he's built up a worldwide audience for his looping and processing approach to bass sound. Recent collaborators include Beardyman, Reeves Gabrels, Andy Gangadeen, Tanya Donelly, Divinity Roxx, and Jonas Hellborg. He been teaching bass for almost three decades, and lectures at universities and colleges across the globe. Victor Wooten once commented, 'Steve Lawson is a brilliant musician. I've known about him and listened to him for many years. He may not be one of the most famous bassists—but he is definitely one of the most talented'. Who are we to argue?

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## PHILIP MANN

**Now you're rolling, it's time to hit the next level**

Philip Mann studied at the London College of Music, securing bachelor's and master's degrees in performance before receiving a scholarship to study under Jeff Berlin at the Players School of Music in Florida. Endorsed by Overwater and Eich, he's a busy, internationally freelancing electric and double bassist. His performance and session credits include work with Grammy Award-winning artists Van Morrison and Albert Lee, five-time Grammy Award nominee Hunter Hayes, Deep Purple's Steve Morse, Leo Sayer, Billy Bragg and country artist Peter Dinklage. Author of the *Chord Tone Concepts* texts, Philip is currently a member of the visiting faculty at the Players School while simultaneously lecturing for Scott's Bass Lessons.

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## STUART CLAYTON

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Stuart Clayton has been a professional musician, writer and transcriber since 2002 and has worked in function bands, on cruise ships, theater shows and more. He spent four years recording and touring the world with Emerson, Lake & Palmer drummer Carl Palmer and was one of the original writers at *Bass Guitar* magazine. From 2007 to 2019 Stuart worked as the Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Bristol UK, where he taught all levels of the degree course. In addition, he has also worked as the Bass Guitar Technical Specialist for the Rockschoool exam board. Stuart now runs Bassline Publishing, which publishes transcription books for bassists such as Mark King, Stuart Zender, Marcus Miller, Stuart Hamm and Bernard Edwards, as well as an acclaimed range of tuition books.

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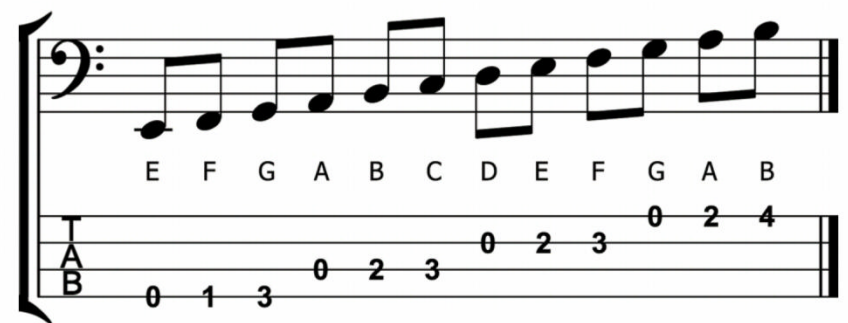


# BP Notation Legend

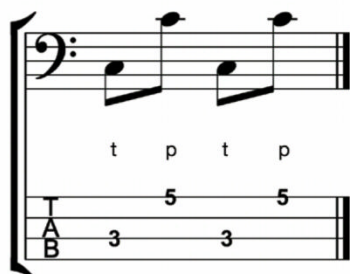
The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in Bass Player magazine

**The Staff:** Most music written for the bass guitar uses the bass clef. The example to the right shows the placement of the notes on the staff.

**Tablature:** This is a graphical representation of the music. Each horizontal line corresponds with a string on the bass guitar, with the lowest line representing the lowest pitched string (E). The numbers represent the frets to be played. Numbers stacked vertically indicate notes that are played together. Where basses with five or six strings are required, the tablature staff will have five or six lines as necessary.

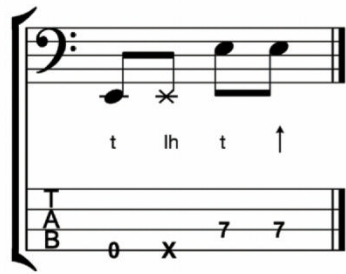


## PLAYING TECHNIQUES



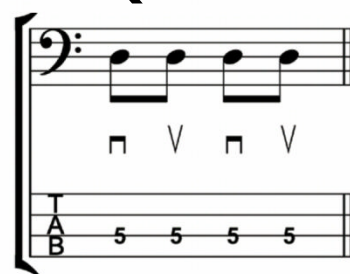
### SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE

Notes slapped with the thumb are marked with a 't', notes popped with the fingers marked with a 'p'.



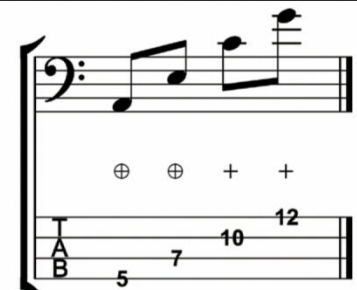
### ADVANCED SLAP TECHNIQUE

Fretting hand slaps are marked 'lh' and double thumbing upstrokes are shown with an upward pointing arrow.



### PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE

Where necessary, down and upstrokes with the pick will be shown using these symbols (down-up-down-up).



### TAPPING TECHNIQUES

Fretting hand taps have a '+' in a circle. Picking hand taps are just '+'. Particular fingers may be shown with numbers.

## FRETTING TECHNIQUES



### HAMMER-ON AND PULL-OFF

These are shown with a slur over the notes. Only the first note is plucked by the picking hand.



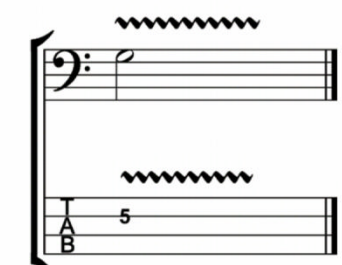
### SLIDE (GLISSANDO)

Slides are performed by playing the first note and then sliding the fretting finger up to the second note.



### TRILLS

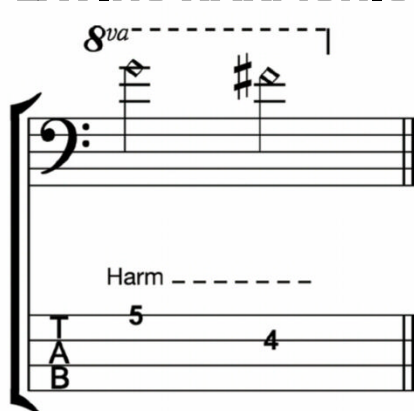
Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown, using hammer-ons and pull-offs.



### VIBRATO

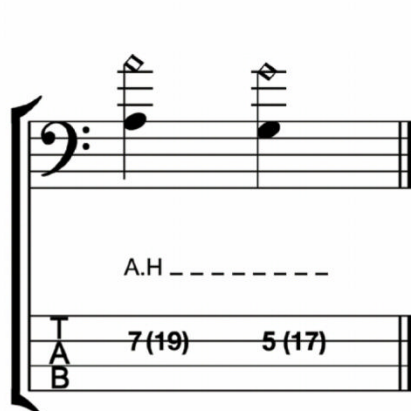
The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger.

## PLAYING HARMONICS



### NATURAL HARMONICS

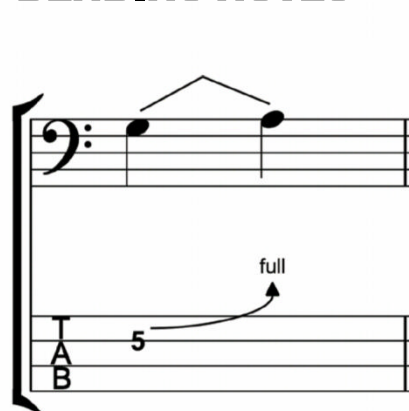
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated.



### ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

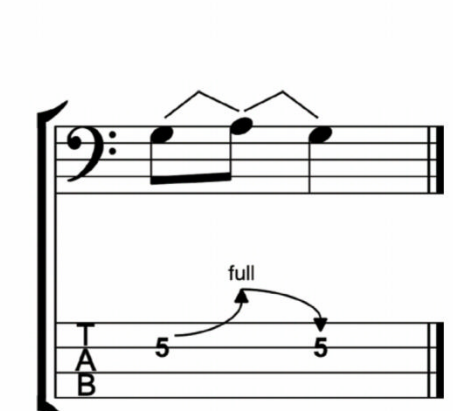
Pluck while fretting the lower note and touching the edge of the picking hand thumb to the note in brackets.

## BENDING NOTES



### BEND

The note is bent upwards to the interval specified: 1/2 indicates a semitone, 'full' indicates a tone.



### BEND AND RELEASE

The note is bent up to the interval indicated and then released back to its original pitch.



I SPY...

# OCTAVE-BASED BASS-LINES, PT. 2



In session and stage bassist Ryan Madora's amazing new column, we discover a stack of useful secrets hidden inside our favorite bass-lines

**H**ey there, bass players! Welcome to Part Two of our octave discussion. Knowing how to intuitively execute an octave will come in handy every time you pick up your instrument. It can define the groove of a song or add a bit of variation to your bass-line; it can take you to a different region of the neck and influence the intensity of a chorus. In other words, it's a musical element that can be dressed up or down to fit any occasion. Let's give it some extra love!

In my previous column, we discussed two ways to play an octave, either within our four-fret span or by jumping one string over and shifting higher on the neck. We applied these concepts to simple rhythms, common chord progressions, and the major scale. By now, I hope you're well acquainted with the basics of this technique.

Now, it's time to take it a step further. We'll discuss how to use the octave intuitively, as something that can easily sneak in to our playing or take center stage within a composed bass part. In addition to falling quite nicely on the neck, especially when we follow the 'two up, two over' rule, octaves simply sound good. It's the easy, obvious, and comfortable way to break away from the root note without having to worry about chord

tones or clashing with another instrument. In a world of complexity, where we often feel stumped by the mysteries of music, we can find solace in the octave and use its consonance to our advantage.

In order to develop this intuitive nature, we need to become more agile. This notion of agility is both mental and physical. Mentally, we need to familiarize ourselves with the rhythmic possibilities of the octave—the fact that we can create any number of grooves, based on where we place the root note and the octave within our pattern. Physically, we need to practise skipping strings with our plucking

## We can always find solace in the octave, and use its consonance to our advantage

hand. As we integrate complex rhythms, octaves can become quite clumsy to play, especially when we question how to alternate fingers with our plucking hand.

For the sake of woodshedding and repetition, these workouts will all feature the same chromatic pattern. We'll begin by playing an E on the 7th fret of our A string and

the octave of that note, the E on the 9th fret of our G string. Then, descend to C# and play the root note on the 4th fret of the A string and the octave on the 6th fret of the G string. From there, we'll move chromatically, playing roots and octaves on D, followed by D#. Land on E for a sense of resolution, or loop the exercise again. Warm up by playing eighth notes—two attacks on the root, two attacks on the octave—for two bars each, as in **Exercise 1**.

As you play through this pattern, think about how your plucking hand is skipping strings. With two attacks per note, you should naturally alternate by playing 'index-middle' on the A string and 'index-middle' on the G string. If you feel like leading with your middle finger, that's fine too: Just make sure the alternating is consistent and that you're silently jumping over the D string. Practise the same pattern with a swung feel in **Exercise 2**.

In **Exercise 3**, we're going to play a more challenging rhythm, spoken 'one-e-and'. This will make you question your string skipping, since we're no longer playing exactly two attacks per string. For the first four bars of the exercise, I recommend leading with your index finger, hitting the 'e' with your middle finger, and using your index to strike the octave. Then, start the pattern again with your index finger. For the next four bars, where the

### EXERCISE ONE

The musical notation for Exercise One consists of two systems. Each system has a bass staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The first system shows a chromatic pattern of eighth notes: E (7th fret A string), E (9th fret G string), D# (4th fret A string), D# (6th fret G string), D (3rd fret A string), D (5th fret G string), C# (2nd fret A string), and C# (4th fret G string). The tablature below the staff shows the fret numbers for each note. The second system continues the pattern with a repeat sign at the end.



## EXERCISE TWO

Exercise Two consists of two systems of musical notation. Each system includes a bass staff and a guitar tab staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system has two measures, each containing a triplet of eighth notes in the bass staff and corresponding fret numbers (9, 9, 9 and 6, 6, 6) in the guitar tab. The second system also has two measures, each containing a triplet of eighth notes in the bass staff and corresponding fret numbers (7, 7, 7 and 8, 8, 8) in the guitar tab. The notation includes repeat signs and a double bar line at the end of the second system.

## EXERCISE THREE

Exercise Three consists of three systems of musical notation. Each system includes a bass staff and a guitar tab staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system has two measures, each containing a triplet of eighth notes in the bass staff and corresponding fret numbers (9, 9, 9 and 6, 6, 6) in the guitar tab. The second system also has two measures, each containing a triplet of eighth notes in the bass staff and corresponding fret numbers (7, 7, 7 and 8, 8, 8) in the guitar tab. The third system has two measures, each containing a triplet of eighth notes in the bass staff and corresponding fret numbers (5, 5, 5 and 6, 6, 6) in the guitar tab. The notation includes repeat signs and a double bar line at the end of the third system.

octave is smack dab in the middle, try using your index finger for both notes on the A string and your middle finger for the octave played on the G string. While these striking patterns don't perfectly adhere to the alternating rule, you may find it easier to play each phrase beginning with the same finger. For extra practice, take a similar approach, this time playing the rhythm 'one-and-uh'.

Finally, consider a 16th-note challenge—which is worthy of a tempo reduction. With each four-bar phrase, we shift the placement of the octave, reaching for it on the 'e', the 'and', and finally, the 'uh'. String skipping

will be difficult, so start slowly and work on plucking-hand mechanics. This technique becomes particularly useful when you have the opportunity to accent a hit with a drummer: As they bash a crash cymbal, match it with an octave. This added emphasis will showcase your musical intuition, make the rhythm section tighter, and perhaps earn you a smile from a fellow band member.

Now, it's time to spy these octaves on some classic records. If you can confidently play through **Exercise 2**, then you'll find real-world application on the Steely Dan hit, 'Reelin' In The Years'. This bass-line

showcases the octave in all its glory, applied to a shuffle feel with short attacks on each note.

Next up, the 1979 classic by the Knack, 'My Sharona'. Talk about putting octaves to work! These punchy attacks match the drum beat perfectly and establish the groove of the song. To properly mimic the record, add a grace note at the beginning of the phrase and slide into the root note.

Once you put these techniques to work, executing an octave will become second nature and a great way to showcase your knack for crafting bass-lines. See you next month! ■





## HONE YOUR SKILLS

# CHROMATIC NOTES EXPLORED



You know you can trust Steve Lawson to guide your journey into the coolest instrument of all. Just look at him!

**H**ello again, and welcome back for another month on the *Bass Player* dojo! This month, we're going to extend last month's exercises to the natural minor scale, and then look at some ways to introduce chromatic notes—which are notes from outside the scale—into the patterns we're forming.

Let's start with the natural minor version of the main exercise from last month, starting on A and going up in groups of two, three, four notes and so on. In **Exercise 1**, we start the pattern on our first finger on the 5th fret of the E string, and that's the note we come back to each time. The other notes can be played 'one finger per fret' across the next four frets, or we can use our little finger for the notes on frets 7 and 8 and brace them with our ring finger if pressing the strings down feels too hard or too big of a stretch.

On the subject of stretching, unless the music is so fast that there's no time for it, pivoting on your thumb as an anchor and moving your hand is a much better way to reach notes up the neck than straining your hand to maintain a single position. As you move further up the neck, the frets get closer together and the stretch lessens.

Where a four-fret span becomes comfortable for you will depend on your physiology, your bass and the position you sit or stand in to play. However you play, protecting your hands is a really important part of developing any technique, and while it's okay for your hands to feel tired after a lot of repetition, exercises should never be painful.

With that in mind, let's have a look at the inverted version of this exercise, coming down from the octave [see **Exercise 2**].

## Where a four-fret span becomes comfortable depends on your physiology and position

When we start coming down from the top, it makes most sense to use our little finger, and brace it with our ring finger if needed. A strict one-finger-per-fret approach here would have us starting on our third finger, but until the line requires it, you may find it more comfortable to use your little finger and index finger to span three frets,

a whole step, especially down at the lower end of the neck.

When we get to bar two, however, we now have a note on the 8th fret, and so in some positions it may be easier to 'train' your hand to remember the pattern as starting on your ring finger. Here we come across the sometimes conflicting aims of maximum physical comfort, and the need for pattern learning to be consistent, so we can train our muscles and brain to recall those patterns without conscious intervention in terms of which fingers are doing what.

I have a number of kinds of bass-line that have a crossover point, where I switch from a comfort-centric approach on the slower versions to a pattern-memory approach as it gets faster. For some players, training their hands to play wholly consistent patterns in every position at any tempo is the goal. But goals are often at the mercy of the context we're playing in, and as beginners, my advice to you is to prioritise comfort and ease of playing at slower tempos so that you don't do yourself an injury.

So the fretting hand fingers for the descending line can either start on your ring finger, so your little finger is automatically lined up with the notes on the 8th fret,

### EXERCISE ONE

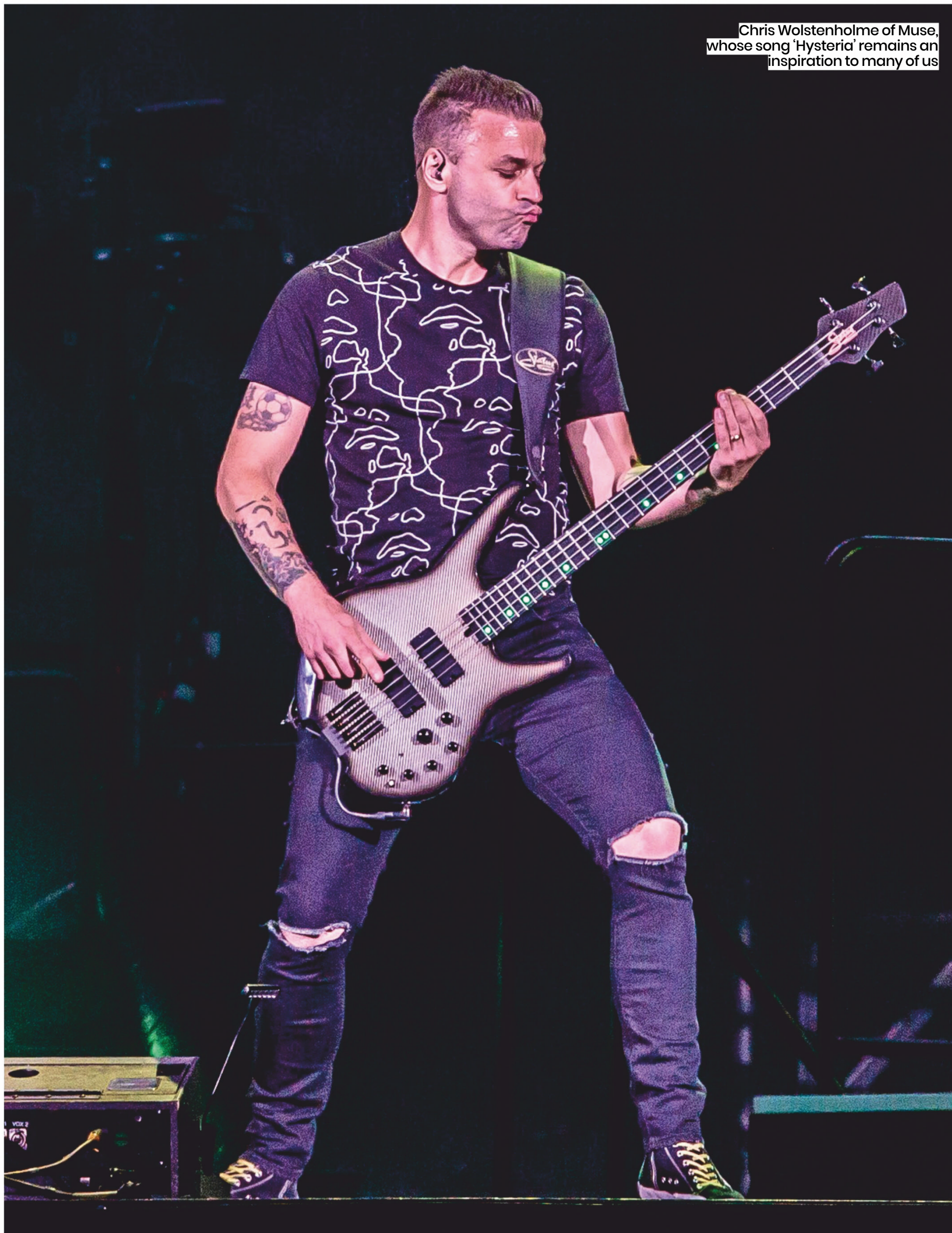
The exercise is presented in two systems, each with a musical staff and a corresponding fretboard diagram below it.

**System 1:** The musical staff shows a sequence of notes: A (5th fret), B (6th fret), C (7th fret), D (8th fret), E (9th fret), F (10th fret), G (11th fret), and A (12th fret). The fretboard diagram below shows the fingerings: 5, 5, 7, 5, 7, 8, 5, 7, 8, 5, 5, 7.

**System 2:** The musical staff shows a descending sequence of notes: A (12th fret), G (11th fret), F (10th fret), E (9th fret), D (8th fret), C (7th fret), B (6th fret), and A (5th fret). The fretboard diagram below shows the fingerings: 8, 5, 7, 5, 7, 8, 5, 7, 8, 5, 7, 8, 5.



Chris Wolstenholme of Muse,  
whose song 'Hysteria' remains an  
inspiration to many of us







# Beginners Lesson

## EXERCISE TWO

Exercise Two musical notation and fretboard diagrams. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2. The fretboard diagrams show fingerings for each note: 7, 5, 8, 7, 5, 8, 7, 5, 8, 7, 5, 8, 7, 5, 8, 7.

## EXERCISE THREE

Exercise Three musical notation and fretboard diagrams. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2. The fretboard diagrams show fingerings for each note: 7, 5, 8, 7, 5, 8, 7, 5, 8, 7, 5, 8, 7, 5, 8, 7.

or you can start on your little finger and pivot on your thumb after the G at the 5th fret on the D string to move your hand up to the F on the A string, staying as relaxed as you can.

If this is starting to feel confusing, I'd like to suggest an approach taught by the late, great Gary Peacock, the legendary double bassist who passed away recently. He describes in his tutorial video for Homespun Tapes a method of simply sitting with the instrument for five minutes before he starts playing. It sounds like a ridiculously simple thing to do—or even to not do. His point is that it's when we're still that we notice things going on in our bodies, and if we jump straight in and start playing lines and

patterns and songs, we don't give our brain time to recognize where discomfort and even pain are present when we play.

Sitting still and paying attention to how you feel, noticing whether or not you're actually comfortable on your chair, or that your fretting hand is having to support the weight of the bass neck and that's why you're really struggling to get any kind of fluidity of movement, is crucial.

So, take a few moments to sit still with your bass, try to position it where your access to the neck feels most relaxed, and try the exercise slowly, maintaining an awareness of how it all feels. It's in this heightened state of awareness that we start to develop something of an intuition about which particular way to play a given bass-line or pattern, after researching the various ways in which it might possibly be played.

**When we're still, we notice things going on in our bodies. If we jump straight in and play, we don't give our brain time to recognize discomfort**



The great Kim Deal, pictured here during her stint with the Pixies

Photo: Getty Images

Back to the exercise. Another possible variation on this line is to walk back up to the octave as part of each scale fragment. Again, this highlights hand positioning and fingering choices [see **Exercise 3**].

Playing this line up and down reminds us that scale fragments can start and end anywhere, and that our choices about where they change are ultimately musical choices that have technical solutions, not technical exercises in search of a song to insert them into! We're breaking up the scale in as many ways as possible, and by combining the ideas from last month about starting on each note of the scale in turn with this month's new patterns, we start to build up a fairly comprehensive set of scale fragments whose sounds we'll hopefully start to recognize, internalize and recall when they fit the song and enhance the direction of the bass part.

As promised at the beginning of this column, we're now going to have a look at how chromatic notes can be introduced into this exercise. To do that, I want to look at the minor pentatonic scale, and then we'll apply what we learn from it to a more complex pattern using the natural minor scale above.

## One of the easiest ways to introduce chromaticism into a line is to approach the notes on the minor pentatonic from a semitone below each one

One of the easiest ways to introduce chromaticism into a line is to approach the notes of the minor pentatonic from a semitone below each one. **Exercise 4** is a version of that pattern with the line returning to the root after each pair.

This is a bit of a workout for both hands, requiring both your picking and fretting hands to cross strings in both directions and using some unusual intervals, but it shows us something very important about bass-line creation—that direction is often more important than just making sure that every note is in the right key. Here, lots of the notes are 'out'—we've even got a Major third (C#) in a minor pattern—but because each chromatic note is resolved immediately, our ear can follow the logic of the line.

The way we've written it here, the chromatic notes are dotted throughout the line on both weak and strong beats.

You'd need to be pretty clever with how you're accenting the rest of the music to properly make sense of this exercise in a song context. Let's look at what happens if we use this as a series of fills in an otherwise diatonic eighth note line.

For **Exercise 5**, I've alternated four notes from the A natural minor scale and then one of the chromatic approach notes from the previous exercise. It sounds a little forced because it's written as an exercise, but I hope the invitation to use chromatic approach notes is clear. Each of the chromatic notes gives the line a jazzier feel, adding surprise and additional movement to the line.

It's worth noting at this point that the application of these kinds of note choices is never just a matter of dropping a pattern into a song and justifying it by referring back to an exercise. The exercise presents a range of possible ways of approaching bass-line



# ★ Beginners Lesson

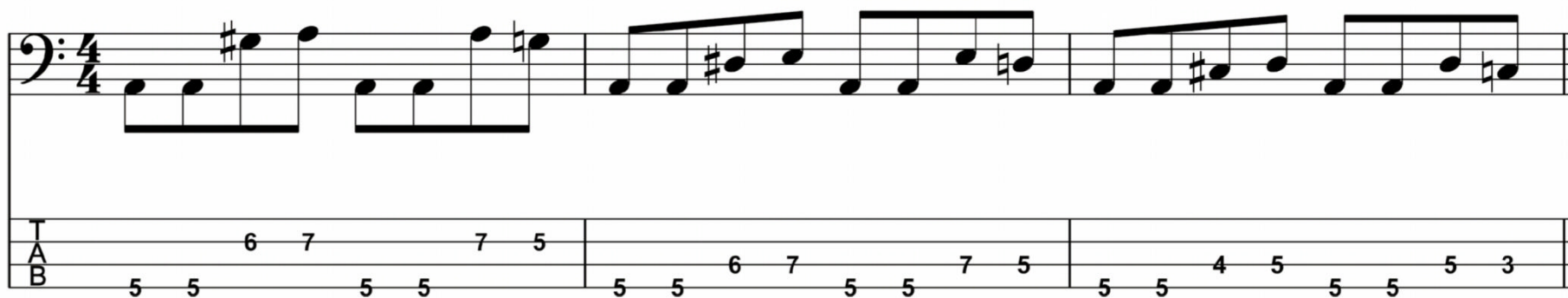
## EXERCISE FOUR



## EXERCISE FIVE



## EXERCISE SIX



construction, and opens a door to you coming up with your own exercises that focus on the sounds that catch your ear.

However, applying it is always about the context. If you're writing a riff that's over a single chord, the degree of dissonance you can introduce is different than if you're expecting the line to help anticipate a more regular set of chord changes. Even there, how long you're on each chord will affect what you can get away with.

An amazing example of how adding chromatic approach notes to scale tones can create a signature bass-line is Chris Wolstenholme's legendary line from

'Hysteria' by Muse. The dexterity required to play the line is beyond our scope here, but recognizing what happens when we apply this concept in such an amazing way can help us build a sense of what these chromatic ideas can bring to the music. The 'Hysteria' bass-line doesn't apply the same concept to every chord: It's only the third chord that has the descending chromatic line, because Chris wasn't working out how to fit an exercise into a song, he was using the breadth of his knowledge to write a memorable bass-line that lifts the whole song.

Let's finish with one last exercise that alternates between chromatic approach

notes and the nearest note in the A minor scale to each of them [see **Exercise 6**]. Again, take it slowly: Just because they're eighth notes doesn't mean they have to be played fast. We can start the tempo out very slowly indeed to get comfortable with the string crossing in both hands.

The other thing to notice here is that it's a three-bar phrase. Exercises like this can help us expand our sense of what's possible in terms of irregular numbers of bars within a particular phrase. This can break up a song really nicely, and coupled to the chromatic notes in the line, can accentuate that off-kilter feel.

Bands like Throwing Muses and the Pixies have used these kinds of patterns to great effect: Kim Deal of the latter band often used chromatic approach notes to many of her classic lines. Have fun, and I'll see you in a month! ■

**The 'Hysteria' bass-line doesn't apply the same concept to every chord: it's only the third chord that has the descending chromatic line**



Master of the flow state: The late  
maestro Gary Peacock.





Phil Mann guides us into those super-useful pentatonic scales. Are you ready for the rule of five?

## PENTATONICS

# PENTATONIC SCALES REVEALED

**E**very couple of months there comes a time for us to write a new title on the board and commence the next chapter of our bass education. A few issues ago we arrived at that very moment, and embarked upon a new study of the five-note melodic wonders – pentatonic scales.

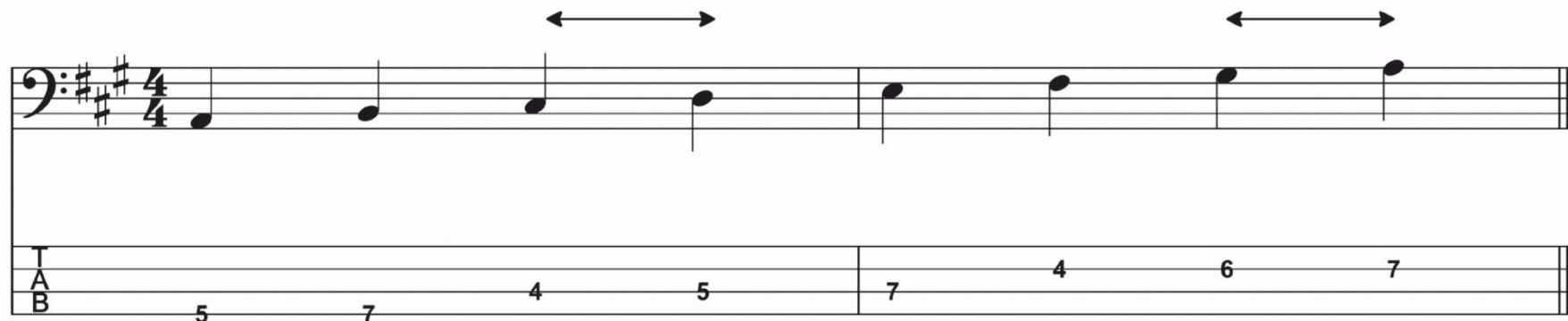
Let's recap on our initial analysis of pentatonic vocabulary. Essentially, removing the tensions within a parent scale produces

a pentatonic structure. For example, if you play the formula 'whole-step, whole-step, half-step, whole-step, whole-step, whole-step, half-step' anywhere on your bass, you'll produce a major scale. Then, simply omit the half-steps: the result is a five-note scale where the more dissonant tensions have been removed, but the triad is still present. This means that the pentatonic formula is 'whole-step, whole-step, minor 3rd, whole-step, minor 3rd'. Let's go! ■

**Omitting the half-steps from a pentatonic results in a five-note scale where the more dissonant tensions are removed, but the triad is still present**

### EXERCISE ONE

♩ = 80



Exercise 1 reacquaints us with the A major scale. To improve fingerboard fluidity, let's try and produce it on a single string. This will help to increase your awareness of the positions of the half-steps, which have arrows above the notation to show you where they are.

### EXERCISE TWO

♩ = 80



Example 2 shows us the major scale with the half-steps omitted, and the remaining notes forming the major pentatonic scale. Take the time to count each individual half-step between the residual notes to reinforce your understanding of its construction.



### EXERCISE THREE

♩ = 80

5 7 9 7 9 12 9 11 14 11 14 14 11 14 11 9 12 9 7 9 7 5

Example 3 will once again require you to deliver the diatonic information in the preceding example, this time over two octaves. All you really have to do is duplicate, and then replicate, the formula in a higher register. As your fretting hand moves through the octaves, it'll be required to embrace some positional changes. Commence your ascent with your index finger, but pay attention to the arrows above the notation, as these allow you to track your fretting hand's location as you progress through the exercise.

### EXERCISE FOUR

♩ = 80

5 7 4 7 4 7 4 6

Although the majority of scales are made up of just seven pitches, it's important to acknowledge that any one of these pitches can appear in an array of diverse positions and registers. For example, the note G appears as open string 1, at fret 3 on string 4, fret 10 on string 3, fret 12 of string 1, fret 15 on string 4 and fret 17 on string 2 – and that's just the options on a four-string instrument! Because of this, it's easy to see why performing selected rudimental shapes can be limiting. Example 4 notates our A major pentatonic scale, but this time with two additional pitches in the upper register, beyond the restraints of a simple octave.

**Although the majority of scales are made up of just seven pitches, it's important to acknowledge that any one of these pitches can appear in an array of diverse positions and registers**



Ariane Cap:  
educator  
extraordinaire





# Intermediate Lesson

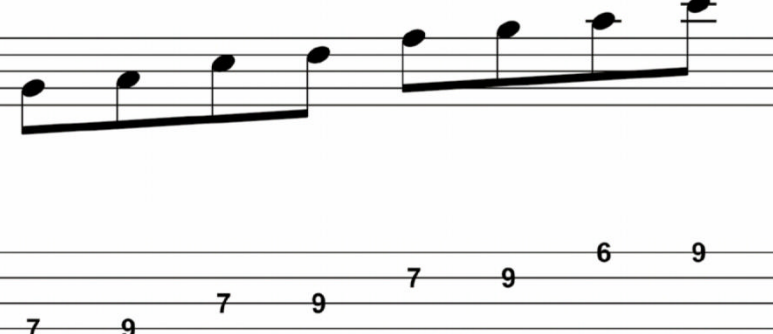
## EXERCISE FIVE

♩ = 80

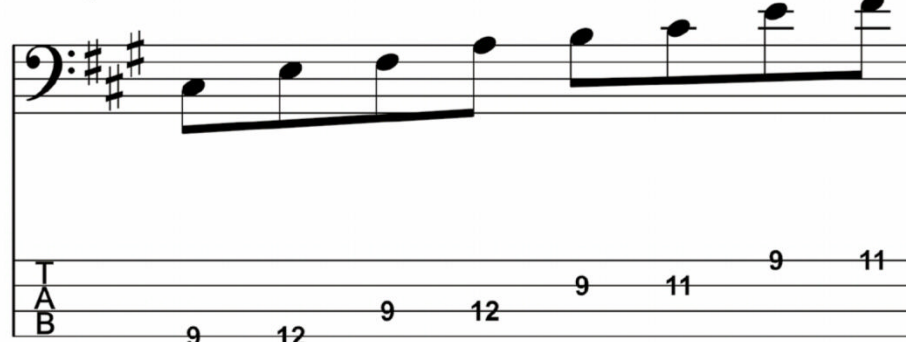
### A Major Pentatonic Mode 1



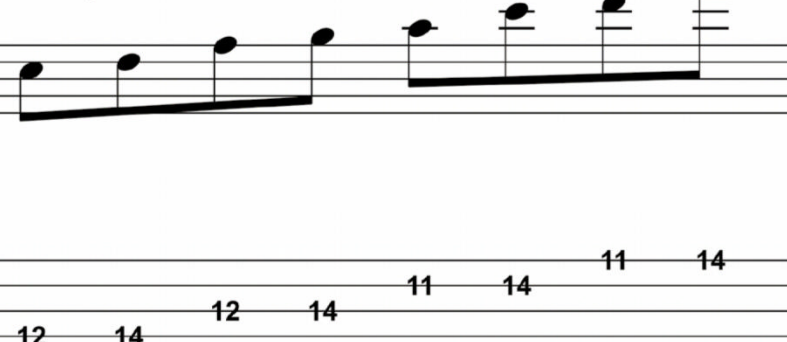
### A Major Pentatonic Mode 2



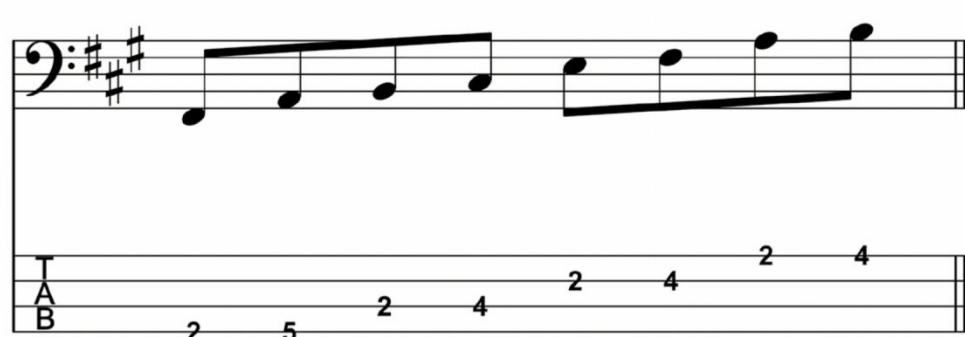
### A Major Pentatonic Mode 3



### A Major Pentatonic Mode 4



### A Major Pentatonic Mode 5



If we continue to expand the elements established in the preceding example, it's possible to produce five independent pentatonic 'modes', which all relate equally to the tonic pitch. Essentially, all you're doing here is playing the same five notes in a variety of positions. I've chosen to depict the final mode in a lower octave than where it naturally resides. This transposition helps evoke a stronger alliance between mode five and the tonic in position one – as opposed to performing it at the dusty end of the fingerboard. However, don't be afraid to relocate the mode back up an octave, should you wish to investigate the potential of the upper register.



Pick master  
Jason Newsted

Let's evoke a stronger alliance between mode five and the tonic in position one, as opposed to at the dusty end of the fretboard



## EXERCISE SIX

♩ = 80

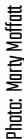
Casting an eye over the final bar of the following notation will draw your attention to two notes that have diamonds portraying the note heads: these are harmonics, or bell-like tones produced by accessing 'node' points on your fingerboard. These points are quite easy to find, if your touch is light and accurate. Simply place your fingertips above the frets indicated and touch the string – but don't hold it down – and then pluck the fundamental firmly. It may take a few attempts to produce a clean, articulate sound, but persevere, as it's a wonderful technique to master.

## EXERCISE SEVEN

♩ = 80

Still within the key of A major, the eight bars in Example 7 present a number of melodic hurdles, the most significant in the third measure with the harmonics in the preceding study. Deliver the descending slurs on a single string in the final bar.





## Michael Rhodes: blues scales aplenty

The musical score for "The Wind" by Peter Dinklage is presented in three systems. The first system includes a tempo marking of ♩ = 80. The bass line is written in a single staff with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar accompaniment is shown in two staves, with the top staff containing fret numbers and the bottom staff containing chord symbols (T, A, B). The second system continues the bass line and guitar accompaniment, with the guitar staff including a "Harm" (harmonic) section. The third system concludes the piece with a double bar line and repeat dots. The guitar staff includes a "Harm" section and a final chord symbol (T, A, B).



# EXERCISE NINE

♩ = 80

8va-----|

Harm

8va-----|

8va-----|

Harm

Harm

8va-----|

Harm

This month's final study may seem quite technical, but remember that everything in this, and the other exercises, is produced from the major pentatonic modes. The tablature will prove useful in these circumstances, as it'll allow you to identify which modal positions are being portrayed at any one time. I'll see you next month!

## If you only practise one thing this month...

Learn the major pentatonic formula: 'whole-step, whole-step, minor 3rd, whole-step, minor 3rd', and see how many different ways in which you can produce it. With every new insight, you'll discover an array of new phrasing and articulation that will ultimately benefit your performance.



The great Ed Friedland with the Mavericks

Photo: Getty Images



DOUBLE THUMBS

# ADD POPS WHILE DOUBLE THUMBING



Stuart Clayton takes us on an unforgettable journey through advanced bass techniques...

**W**elcome back to my long-running Advanced series, which in recent months has been focusing on advanced slap bass techniques. Last month, we began delving into the double thumbing technique, where the thumb is employed in a similar manner to that of a pick, by performing upstrokes as well as downstrokes. Last time we confined ourselves to lines that required only thumbstrokes: In this month's new instalment, we will be adding popped notes back into the equation. Doing so will result in a slap technique that is very versatile indeed,

one which will eventually allow you to use it to play lines that you might otherwise have played fingerstyle. But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves...

## Adding Popped Notes

We're going to add popped notes to the double thumbing technique, initially by playing some basic scales. If you read last month's column, you'll recall that we already played scales using the double thumbing technique, although in those exercises we doubled every note of the scale so as to avoid any string crossing problems. When playing scales, it's common to play three notes on a

string: With the double thumbing technique, this can often lead to situations where a downstroke is played on one string, and an upstroke is then required on a lower string. This is a tricky situation to find yourself in and we avoided it entirely last month by doubling each note in the scale. We're going to confront the problem head-on now.

**Exercise 1** features the basic fingering for the C major scale, played within a four-fret reach. You should use the one-finger-per-fret system in your fretting hand here. You can see that now we're adding popped notes into the mix, it's relatively simple to play the scale using a combination of thumb down- and upstrokes, as well as popped notes. The inclusion of the popped notes solves all of the potential string-crossing issues that might otherwise have arisen.

There are different combinations of downstrokes, upstrokes, and popped notes that could be used here, but this is the most

**Adding popped notes can allow you to use your slap technique to play lines that you might have otherwise played fingerstyle**

### EXERCISE ONE

♩ = 100

### EXERCISE TWO

♩ = 100





Photo: Getty Images

Jaco influenced us  
all in more ways  
than one

### EXERCISE THREE

$\text{♩} = 100$

Sheet music for Exercise Three, 4/4 time, tempo 100. The exercise consists of four measures of music. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (3, 5, 7) followed by eighth notes (8, 10, 12). The second measure contains eighth notes (9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17). The third measure contains eighth notes (17, 16, 14, 17, 15, 14, 12, 10). The fourth measure contains eighth notes (9, 7, 5, 3, 2, 0) followed by a triplet of eighth notes (3).

Technique: T (Triplet), ↑ (Upstroke), P (Palm Mute). The sequence of techniques for the four measures is: T ↑ T ↑ T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ T ↑ P, T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ T.

### EXERCISE FOUR

$\text{♩} = 100$

Sheet music for Exercise Four, 4/4 time, tempo 100. The exercise consists of four measures of music. The first measure contains eighth notes (8, 10, 7, 8, 10, 7, 9, 10). The second measure contains eighth notes (7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17). The third measure contains eighth notes (17, 16, 14, 17, 15, 14, 12, 10). The fourth measure contains eighth notes (9, 12, 10, 8, 7, 5, 8).

Technique: T (Triplet), ↑ (Upstroke), P (Palm Mute). The sequence of techniques for the four measures is: T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ T.





# Advanced Lesson

## EXERCISE FIVE

♩ = 110

Exercise Five, measures 1-8. The exercise is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 110. It features a bass line with double thumbing and popping techniques. The notation includes a staff with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The bass line is written in a simplified notation with 'T' for thumb and 'P' for pop, with arrows indicating the direction of the stroke. The fretboard is shown with fingerings and positions marked with 'X' and numbers.

## EXERCISE SIX

♩ = 110

Exercise Six, measures 1-8. The exercise is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 110. It features a bass line with double thumbing and popping techniques. The notation includes a staff with a key signature of two sharps and a 4/4 time signature. The bass line is written in a simplified notation with 'T' for thumb and 'P' for pop, with arrows indicating the direction of the stroke. The fretboard is shown with fingerings and positions marked with 'X' and numbers.

logical. To get maximum mileage out of this exercise, I recommend playing it in all 12 keys. Let's now expand on this exercise.

In **Exercise 2**, we're using the double thumb and pop technique to play two-octave major scales. There are many different ways to traverse the fingerboard when playing a two-octave scale, and this is just one

example. Regardless of the technique you're using to play a scale, it's important that you explore several different routes across the fingerboard. Let's look at some alternatives together.

**Exercise 3** is an alternative way of playing the C major scale over two octaves, using the double thumbing and popping technique.

**Exercise 4** is a third alternative. As noted above, to get the most out of these exercises, you should explore other scales and other keys.

If you already have a scale practice routine in place, perhaps consider working through it using the double thumbing and popping technique for a few weeks?



## EXERCISE SEVEN

♩ = 90

Exercise Seven consists of two systems of musical notation in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 90 beats per minute. Each system has a bass clef staff with eighth notes and a corresponding line of fingerings and techniques. The first system includes a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure. The second system includes a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the last measure. The fingerings and techniques are as follows:

System 1:

Staff 1: T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑

Staff 2: 5 X 8 X 5 X 7 X 3 X 4 X 5 X 8 X 5 X 7 X 3 X 2 X

System 2:

Staff 1: T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ T ↑ P T ↑ T ↑

Staff 2: 0 X 2 X 3 X 5 X 7 X 5 X 0 X 2 X 3 X 5 X 6 5 3 5 3

## EXERCISE EIGHT

♩ = 110

Exercise Eight consists of two systems of musical notation in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 110 beats per minute. Each system has a bass clef staff with eighth notes and a corresponding line of fingerings and techniques. The first system includes a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure. The second system includes a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the last measure. The fingerings and techniques are as follows:

System 1:

Staff 1: T ↑ T ↑ T ↑ T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ T ↑ T ↑ P T ↑ T ↑ T ↑

Staff 2: 8 8 6 6 8 8 X 6 8 6 6 8 6 6 8 8 8 X 6 8 8 8 9 9 10 10

System 2:

Staff 1: T ↑ T ↑ T ↑ T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ P T ↑ T ↑ T ↑ T ↑ T ↑ T ↑ T ↑

Staff 2: 8 8 6 6 8 8 X 6 8 6 6 8 6 6 8 5 5 6 6 7 7 8 8

### Playing Sixteenth Note-Based Grooves

So far, we have been using the double thumbing and popping technique to play eighth note-based lines. We're now going to expand on this technique and begin playing sixteenth note-based parts. Many double thumbing lines are built on a series of

constant sixteenth notes. Quite often the pitched part of the groove will be quite basic, but the gaps will be filled in with ghost notes. Doing so adds a percussive element to the line. There are many examples of this concept in Victor Wooten's music, notably in well-known pieces such as 'Me & My Bass Guitar' and 'You Can't Hold No Groove'.

Through practising scales with this technique you'll have used the three-stroke combination of downstroke-upstroke-pop many times. This three-note figure is perfect for playing triplets, as you might imagine, but it works equally well for playing sixteenth note lines. Let's look at how to incorporate this figure into a sixteenth note line.



## EXERCISE NINE

♩ = 120

E<sup>7</sup><sub>b9</sub>

Exercise Nine is a 4/4 piece in E<sup>7</sup><sub>b9</sub> at 120 bpm. The notation shows a bass line with a double-thumbed passage in the second measure. The guitar fretboard diagram shows the following fret numbers for the first two measures: 0, 7, 5, 7, 0, 3, 3, 4, 4, 6, 6, 7, 7, 4, 4, 5, 5, 7, 7, 8, 8, 5, 5, 8, 8. The third measure starts with a double-thumbed passage (0, 7, 5, 7, 0, 3, 3, 4, 4) followed by a sequence of frets: 6, 6, 7, 7, 4, 4, 5, 5, 7, 7, 8, 8, 12, 13.

The long double-thumbed passage in Exercise 9 has an unusual sound as the notes are taken from the E ‘half step, whole step’ diminished scale, making it perfect for playing over an E<sup>7</sup><sub>b9</sub> chord

## EXERCISE TEN

♩ = 105

Exercise Ten is a 4/4 piece at 105 bpm. The notation shows a bass line with a double-thumbed passage in the second measure. The guitar fretboard diagram shows the following fret numbers for the first two measures: 1, X, 3, X, 1, 3, 1, 1, 3, 3, 1, X, 3, X, X, 0, 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 3. The third measure starts with a double-thumbed passage (1, X, 3, X, 1, 3, 1, 1, 3, 3) followed by a sequence of frets: 1, X, 3, X, X, 0, 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 5, 6, 5, 8, 8, 7, 6, 5, 8, 5, 6, 5, 6, 7, 8, 6.



In **Exercise 5**, the aforementioned three-note down-up-pop figure has been used for most of the exercise. Note that in each bar it is used four times in a row, (3+3+3+3) totalling 12 sixteenth notes. These notes make up the first three beats of the bar. The remaining beat is made up of four sixteenth notes, played using just down and upstrokes. This is a great exercise for getting acquainted with the technique, and will hopefully open your eyes to the many possibilities it presents.

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## Utilizing different thumbing and popping sequences can make for interesting grooves

**Exercise 6** is a double-thumbed funk groove that uses the same downstroke-upstroke-pop figure, but in tandem with other combinations. For example, in the first bar the down-up-pop sequence is played twice, then followed with a simple down-up. This is then repeated on the third and fourth beats of the bar. Utilizing different thumbing and popping sequences in this way can make for some interesting grooves. Similarly, **Exercise 7** is a third groove that makes use of the same techniques.

To finish off this month's column, I'm going to leave you with three exercises that are a little more challenging to complete. All of the techniques required to play these lines have already been covered in this column and the previous one, but these are lines which might take a little longer to get under your belt.

**Exercise 8** is a sixteenth note funk groove. Here, it has been adapted to be played with the double thumbing technique. The popped notes have been used here not only for effect, but also to ensure that the thumb downstrokes fall in sensible places. Without them, you would find yourself playing a downstroke, then having to jump strings, which is very awkward.

**Exercise 9** features a more traditional slap figure at the beginning of the first and third bars, then moves into a double thumbed sixteenth note run. This long double-thumbed passage has an unusual sound, because the notes are taken from the E 'half step, whole step' diminished scale, making it perfect for playing over an E7<sub>9</sub> chord. Although this is quite a fast exercise, the double thumbing pattern itself is quite simple and shouldn't present too much of a problem.

Francis 'Rocco' Prestia in full flow



Photo: Getty Images

**Exercise 10** is another line that was originally a fingerstyle funk groove,

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## Study the slap guides carefully—this is a teaser for next month's instalment

but which has been adapted to be played with the thumb. This line includes a triplet in the fourth bar: Study the slap guides carefully here. This is a bit of a teaser for next month's instalment, where we will be looking at triplets in more detail.

That's it for this month. Next time we'll be expanding on the double thumbing and popping technique and using it to play triplet-based lines. Until then... ■



**I**magine this scenario: You've just bought a new amplifier from a store, after it has been demonstrated to you by helpful staff. You may have even bought it online after watching some top-quality video reviews. On arriving home, you plug in, you consider the tone controls—and then you discover that the manual doesn't tell you what they are and how they interact with each other.

Never fear! I'm going to talk about what's inside the box...

### Start with the basics, Veall.

Okay then. You know that your bass plugs into the input socket, and that the speaker cabinet is attached to an amplifier output socket—yep, even if you've got a combo. Along the way, very small electrical signals from your bass turn into much larger versions that can physically drive your speakers up to drummer-annoying levels.

### That's always welcome.

Indeed! Now, there are usually three main sections to your amplifier—the preamplifier (preamp), the effects loop, and the power amp. Let's start with the end of the chain first, which is the power amp. For the most part, this bit can usually achieve a pretty epic job of turning the aforementioned small signals into larger ones, but even if the unit is a single monoblock, there will still be some sort of pre-signal conditioning going on inside that provides the power components with a strong enough signal to deliver full output.

### Uh, what?

You need a preamp to make your bass signal loud enough for the power amp to work with.

### Right. Then what happens?

Our preamp allows us to lift those very small signals—which are especially small if you have vintage pickups—from millivolts to around a volt. It seems logical to introduce some tonal shaping, so the preamp section also includes tone controls, inputs, and line

# The Last Note

THIS MONTH

## AMPLIFIERS EXPLAINED

Dan signs off this issue with a dig inside your amp



Dan Veall is a session and stage bass player, educator and gear expert and is here to answer your questions. Contact: @DanVeallBassist



outs. Some preamps include integrated effects such as compression and distortion, too.

### Define an effects loop for us.

Well, between the preamp and power amp, there's a break in the circuits where the two meet. In most amps, this is where you'll find what we call the effects loop. You'll see a mini patch bay consisting of Send and Return connections. Use these to insert effects that you might not wish to have before the preamp section, such as when your bass is plugged into a pedal and then the pedal is plugged into the amp.

### What else does it do?

This patch bay is also useful as you can simply send your

preamp signal somewhere else, or you could bypass the whole preamp and plug in an external pedal preamp straight into the return connection of the effects loop. This essentially gives you a completely different amplifier sound.

### Does the power amp affect my tone too?

As we've seen, the power amp is the engine that turns small voltage audio signals into larger ones to drive speaker cones. Depending on its design, the power amp module might be acoustically transparent—which means that it doesn't place any additional colour into your tone. However, plenty of examples bring their own character to the

sound of your bass, and are highly sought after for that reason.

### Thanks. Is that it for amps?

Hell no! We're on an eternal search for aural nirvana—or Gear Acquisition Syndrome as it's known on the internet. Next month we'll be learning about watts, impedance—or ohms—and loudness. See you then!

Thanks for reading! Each of my columns will give you some ideas of your own—and remember, there are no rules, so do experiment and let me know how you get on. If you've got a question for me, find me on social media as @DanVeallBassist. Give me a follow! ■



# DAMPEN THEM DOWN AND STOMP ON IT



**RockBoard LED Damper**  
defractive cover for bright LEDs  
available in two sizes: 5/16" + 13/32"

**RockBoard Jewel LED Damper**  
defractive cover for bright LEDs  
available in two sizes: 5/16" + 13/32"

**RockBoard StompPete**  
Footswitch Topper  
available in black or silver

**RockBoard BigToe**  
Footswitch Topper  
available in black or silver



# IT'S IN MY BLOOD

DAVID ELLEFSON  
MEGADETH

## X SERIES SIGNATURE 30TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT™ BASS CBX IV

JACKSON PROUDLY CELEBRATES THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF LANDMARK MEGADETH ALBUM *RUST IN PEACE* AND OUR LONG COLLABORATION WITH FOUNDING MEMBER DAVID ELLEFSON WITH THE X SERIES SIGNATURE DAVID ELLEFSON 30TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT™ BASS CBX IV. THIS INSTRUMENT PAYS HOMAGE TO ELLEFSON'S ORIGINAL QUICKSILVER JACKSON CONCERT BASS, DATING BACK TO THE LATE '80S.

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