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WELCOME



Movie stars love playing bass too. We know, because we asked one.

When I first found out that Jason Momoa was a bass player as well as a star of cinema and TV, I assumed that for him, perhaps bass was merely a

hobby: a way to pass the time on set. Believe me, I couldn't have been more wrong.

As I found out when I sat down with Jason at opposite ends of a recent Zoom call, the man is obsessed with our instrument to the point where it has become a cornerstone of his personal philosophy, just as it is for you and me. This was his first ever interview about his love of playing music, he told us, and it reveals a completely different side of his character. Despite his fearsome exterior (he didn't play Conan, Aquaman, and Khal Drogo for nothing), for Jason, bass is all about nurturing, comfort, and a state of profound calm. Does that sound familiar to you? Of course it does. He's one of us. He *gets it*, just like we all do.

As we head into a new year, there's definitely a light at the end of the coronavirus tunnel, or so we're told. Our gigs should be returning, our livelihoods as musicians should resume, and most importantly, the health of our loved ones should be protected. We celebrate this cautious optimism with a focus on the past, present, and future greats of our community: Ron Carter, Jimmy Haslip, Carol Kaye, and Trevor Dunn among them.

Gear-wise, we road-test the new Bergantino Forté D amp, we trial a radical Lairat bass, and we run an Epiphone Jack Casady through its paces. In our lessons, our stalwart tutors take you to the next level, wherever that may be.

Stay healthy. Better times are on the way!
Joel McIver, Editor



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THE Lowdown

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

CAPTAIN HOOK

Peter Hook gets his own signature Yamaha BB bass.

Yamaha has announced the extremely limited-edition Peter Hook Signature BB bass. Hooky, best known as the bassist and founding member of Joy Division and New Order, has played BB basses for decades, starting with the 600 model and graduating to the 1200S. The new signature bass combines elements of the latter model, of which he owns seven, with aspects of the BB734A which he currently plays on tour with Peter Hook & The Light

"It's such a compliment to be recognized for what you've done," says the great man, a frequent cover star in this magazine over the years. "To have it come full circle and culminate with my own signature bass, made to my specs and to satisfy my playing, is such an honor, and I'm very happy with it. I'm very proud to have worked with Yamaha to develop the BBPH, and I think it's one of the best guitars in the world, if I do say so myself!"

As Hook is known for some of the most haunting upper-register lines ever recorded, Joy Division's 'Love Will Tear Apart' and New Order's 'Regret' being just two obvious examples, the new bass has a reversed P-style pickup that is designed expressly to suit that approach. The neck joint is a modern six-bolt design, while an active/passive preamp, three-band EQ in active mode and passive tone deliver the best of all worlds.

Hook's signature is screened on the back of the headstock, above the note 'Manchester, England!' The BBPH comes with an MSRP of \$2000, with only 14 basses of its kind available in the United States. www.yamaha.io/BBPH



The new Hooky BB comes with its own, true-to-its-owner dedication.

A new order of bridge, allowing through-body options.



RIP SEAN MALONE

The Cynic bassist and widely acclaimed educator departs.



We were very sorry to hear of the death of Sean Malone on December 9. An incredibly talented but humble bassist, Sean was best known for his long-time membership of the progressive metal band Cynic, as well as his solo albums and the supergroup Gordian Knot. He was only 50 years old when he passed away, in a double blow to fans of Cynic, whose drummer Sean Reinert also died long before his time in January 2020.





Slim Picking

New, two-octave Thinline Warwicks are on the way.

Warwick have announced eight new basses for its RockBass Alien Deluxe Hybrid Thinline Series, with fretless and lefty options available. The four-strings come with a 32" scale, while the fives have the standard 34"; the body depth is a mere 3.25"; and the two-octave fingerboards are wenge, on mahogany necks. Spruce tops married with walnut backs and sides bring the tones, while Shadow NanoMag and piezo pickups deliver them up. www.w-distribution.de



Love Lines

A great bass-line in 85 words or less...

No. 2: Rush, 'Digital Man' (released 1982)

When Geddy Lee's Rush hit what was arguably their creative peak in the late 70s and early 80s, they simply could not be stopped. Okay, 'Digital Man' may have a theme which has aged a little in the modern era, but Lee's twisty, rock-solid bass-line gave the song an edge which the years have not diminished. Lee alternated between a J-Bass and his trusty Rickenbacker 4001 on the *Signals* album, and his mastery of the instrument is at its finest during these unparalleled six minutes.



Gear News

Vintage have added a four-string electro-acoustic bass to its Statesboro' series of guitars, designed like the other models in the series by guitarist and blues historian Paul Brett. Promoting a 'bluesman on a budget' theme, the bass comes with a satin matt Whisky Sour finish, an all-mahogany construction and gold-plated die-cast machine heads. The neck is also mahogany and has 20 frets, while Vintage's three-band preamp, phase switch, tuner display, and low battery indicator make the bass a user-friendly item.

Ernie Ball has recently announced a new range of Ball Family Reserve models, among them two basses—a Stingray 5 Special in Kinetic Blue, and the equivalent four-string in Natural Okoume.

For the recent birthday of the late Jaco Pastorius, bassist Alex Lofoco has released an instructional book of lessons called *Contemporary Bass Guitar: Jaco Pastorius*, which contains a deep analysis of Jaco's much-loved *Modern Electric Bass* video.

Italian bassist Lorenzo Feliciati has a new album on the way, *Bumerang*, recorded with guitarist Richard Hallebeek and drummer Niels Voskuil, which whom he first performed at the 2017 North Sea Jazz Festival.



NEW TRACE ELLIOT COMBOS

The veteran amp-makers announce new Elf units.

Like many of our colleagues in the bass community, we were very taken with Trace Elliot's highly portable ELF head when it appeared a couple of years back, so we're keen to get our hands on the long-standing amp-makers' new combos from the same range. Again designed to be lower back-friendly—the press release specifically states “an ultralight, ultra-portable package that players can carry in one hand,” which your chiropractor will appreciate—the range currently runs to two models.

We're told that the ELF 1x8 combo measures 12" by 10.2" by 13.3" and weighs only 17 pounds, while the 1x10 combo measures 13.3" by 12" by 14", and comes in at 18 pounds. Bassists can use a DI to send the

tone to the front of house at a gig, add 2x8 or 1x10 extension cabinets, or use in a recording scenario. Each box contains the aforementioned ultra-compact bass amplifier, which supplies a fan-cooled 200W RMS at 4

ohms: The control panel includes a wide-range input gain control with a signal-level indicator plus a three-band rotary EQ. This latter feature is said to emulate the response of

The three-band rotary equalizer is said to emulate the response of classic Trace Elliot multi-band graphic EQ filters

classic Trace Elliot multi-band graphic EQ filters, which will be welcome news for anyone nostalgic for the massive tones of yesteryear, accompanied by that unmistakable green light.

Retail prices of \$579.99 for the 1x8 and \$599 for the 1x10 set the combos squarely in that super-busy mid-market sector. We're looking forward to testing them in a forthcoming issue.

www.traceelliot.com

Introducing

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

TOP BASS TIP

Matthew Listen to the incredible Paolo Gregoletto of Trivium.

Ginger I always knew that I wanted to be a bassist. Did you?

Matt We're the glue. Without us, it falls apart.



MATTHEW SCHUMACHER THE CURSE WITHIN

WHAT WAS YOUR WAY INTO BASS?

Growing up, I had played the piano, so I was already familiar with musical theory. The way I got into playing bass was my friend and bandmate Eric. At our school we had talent shows, and I noticed some of the older guys would form a band and jam to some songs in front of the school. Eric came up to me one day and said that it would be cool to do this, but that his band didn't have a bass player. It piqued my interest, as I'd always

thought being in a band was cool. Fast forward to my 14th birthday, and my parents bought me a bass. We played our first song in front of the school. It was Blink 182's 'All The Small Things'. My first bass was a Squier—one of those starter bass guitars that came with a small amp. I still have it, and I have a lot of memories of high school associated with it.
Instagram: @mattschumacher_, @thecursewithin



GINGER POOLEY BURNING POOLS

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM YOUR IDOLS?

Iwould have to say my idol is Paul McCartney because I love the Beatles, and besides writing all of those amazing songs, his bass-lines are so good and melodic. They're iconic. I'm not sure if I was actually told this piece of advice, but it is ingrained in me to always be actively listening. Always listen to what the drummer's kick drum is doing. Stay in the pocket, and remain present in the song by actively listening.

Instagram: @burningpools



MATT BARNES YOU ME AT SIX

WHAT IS GOOD BASS PLAYING?

Listening and communicating with your band-members. Listen to what's happening around you, talk to your drummer about kick drum patterns, make sure the guitarist is aware of your ideas, lock into the groove and never just play on top of it, don't dominate when there is a lead line that is drawing the listener's attention, wait for enough space to add fills and flair to your playing. Listen, communicate, and don't overplay.
Instagram: @mattmeatsix

Rehearsing with
Benny Goodman
in 1953.



Photo: Albany

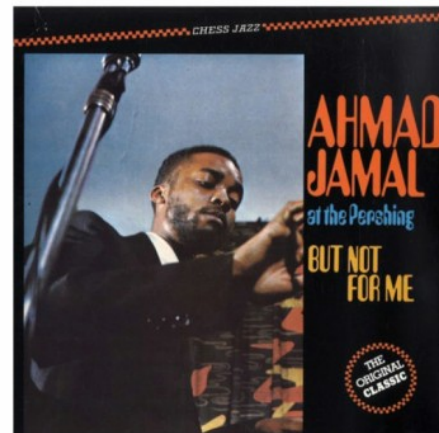
THIS MONTH

Israel Crosby

Chicago jazz bassist Israel Crosby was born in 1919, and a mere 16 years later he was laying down the first ever recorded bass solo. 'Blues Of Israel', alongside Gene Krupa on drums, was one heck of a way to introduce himself as an upright bassist, and the following year he went on to feature on Teddy

Wilson's 'Blues In C Sharp Minor'. That achievement was all the more remarkable given that Crosby had started on trumpet at the age of five, and then learned both trombone and tuba prior to taking up the double bass. Crosby went on to work with a host of names including George Shearing, Gene Ammons, Vernel Fournier, and

more. His work as part of the Ahmad Jamal Trio is probably his best known, with recordings spanning throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, and he also toured with Benny Goodman in the mid-Fifties. In 1962, not long after joining the George Shearing Quintet, Crosby passed away from a heart attack at the age of 43. ■



MUST-HAVE ALBUM

AHMAD JAMAL

At the Pershing (1958)

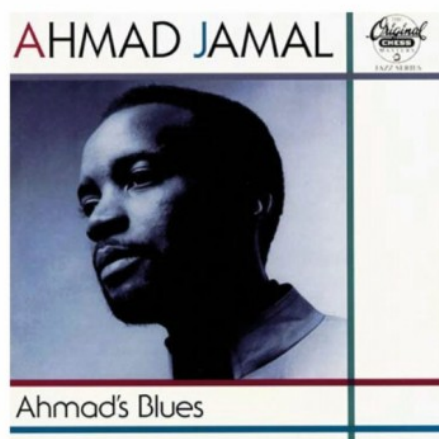


The acclaimed trio of Jamal, Crosby and drummer Vernel Fournier hit big with this live LP. Although only eight tracks eventually made the final tracklisting, in total there had been 43 songs recorded from sessions at Chicago's Pershing Hotel on January 16, 1958.

Accessible and groove-filled, this highly-respected album has gone on to sell over a million copies, and enabled Jamal to open the Alhambra Club, which became the band's established base thereafter. Crosby and Fournier are absolutely locked in together on the songs included here, giving the pop standards a serious funkiness that allowed Jamal's jazz piano to explore and develop on top of the production, as he improvises around and against the rhythm.

The trio's calling card was and remains the sprawling, soaring, eight-minute-long cut of 'Poinciana', which is propelled forward by Crosby's pulsing rhythm. Each of the players takes their turn up front and there's plenty of space for them to do so.

This record remains a solid masterclass in the art of minimal, dance-friendly jazz, and there's an effervescent energy to it that sounds just as fresh now as it did 60 years ago.



WORTHY CONTENDER

AHMAD JAMAL

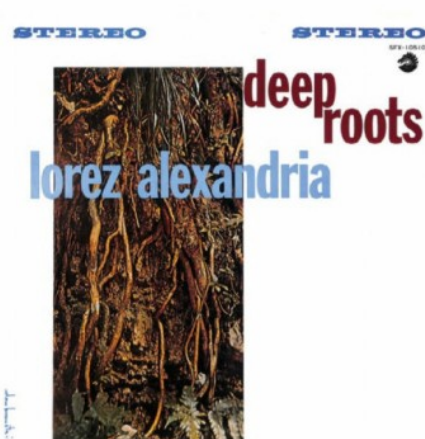
Ahmad's Blues (1958)



One remarkable fact about Israel Crosby is that for a player of a notoriously huge instrument, he was on the diminutive side himself—the end pin of the bass would only extend enough to keep the body of his three-quarter-size Kay off the stage floor. But what a sound he could get from his instrument, dancing across the fingerboard with complete control from bottom to top, and a punchiness that was testament to his energetic technique.

Ahmad's Blues is indeed a bluesy album, but the trio's slick interplay allows for some forays into swing and even mambo rhythm. Crosby's sweetly subtle counterpoint on the title track, for example, takes the concept of walking bass and uses it to weave interest around Jamal's tastefully busy piano.

Crosby steps confidently into the spotlight for the railway-track drive of 'Autumn Leaves', on which he can be heard working up and down the strings and delivering some exceptional high-register solo work, before doubling Jamal's piano part. They're playing as a trio, of course, but somehow it sounds as if there are more musicians than three in the ensemble. This is truly exceptional stuff.



COOL GROOVES

LOREZ ALEXANDRIA

Deep Roots (1962)

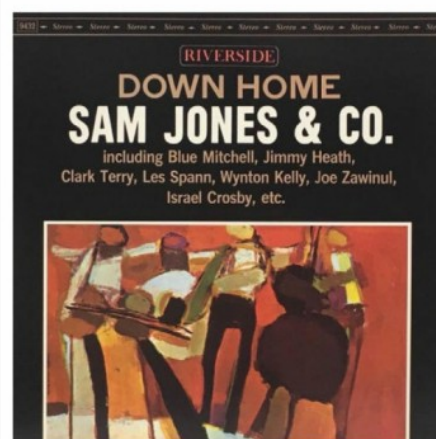


Here, Crosby and Fournier joined trumpeter Howard McGhee, pianist and arranger John Young, and guitarist George Eskridge, to back the vocalist Lorez Alexandria, whose range and naturally smooth phrasing benefited hugely from their solid backbeat.

On this LP, Crosby takes more of a backseat than he had done with Jamal, such as on the jazz-blues of 'Nature Boy', and the wistful 'I Was A Fool', with the latter featuring some easy-rider fifth and octave work. However, he cuts loose a lot more on 'No Moon At All', which is full of descending chromatic walking and occasional double stops.

The late-night smokiness of 'Trav'lin' Light' has the bassist generally working on the root, and letting the sound ring for the fullness of the beat—a lovely contrast to his sparse, staccato syncopation in the more frenetic lines elsewhere on the album.

Best of all, perhaps, is Crosby's effervescent work on 'I Want To Talk About You', a confidently delivered root-and-octave line that makes use of double-stopping, contrapuntal melodicism, and sweet, full sixths that ring out gorgeously in the spaces left by Alexandria's show-stopping vocal.



WILD CARD

SAM JONES & CO.

Down Home (1962)



Israel Crosby was in serious demand at this point in the final years of his career, and appears here on three of the eight tracks from his fellow double bassist Jones. The bandleader also contributes cello to several songs, such as the seven-minute 'Falling In Love With Love', on which Crosby's walking bass forms an ever-shifting anchor to the guitar-like solo contributed by the leader.

Crosby is relentless from the first beat, holding down the rhythm while adding textural touches and syncopated elements where needed. It's the sound of a musician at the top of his craft, and the unison passages of 'O.P.' are testament to a technique refined over the years. It is a loss to all of us that his career was truncated so unexpectedly.

The bassist's other major contribution here is to a rendition of Thelonious Monk's 'Round Midnight', where he contents himself with providing root-note solidity and smooth transitional chromaticism.

Sam Jones' time with Cannonball Adderley's Quintet had served him well, as had his choice of musicians here: This album is widely considered to be an excellent example of early Sixties hard bop.



AVOID AT ALL COSTS

GEORGE SHEARING

Jazz Moments (1963)



Shearing brought Crosby and Fournier together one last time for *Jazz Moments*, an album of promise and quality. It was also Crosby's final recording before his untimely death, which makes it poignant, and even painful, to listen to—hence its position here, rather than because of its quality, which is high.

He is on exceptional form; by now he and the drummer were so tight they could practically brush each other's teeth. The extent of what was lost when Crosby joined the great jazz combo in the sky is evident on his ultra-cool, even nonchalant-sounding, always technically brilliant solo work on songs such as 'Making Whoopie', or the smoothly-delivered fullness of the plaintive 'What's New?' which is part blues regret and part silent movie soundtrack.

The overwhelming vibe of the album, and indeed of Crosby's performance, is that something special was in the process of being developed here. Sometimes the universe has other plans, though, so *Jazz Moments* must serve as an unintended farewell from one of the figurative (if not literal) giants of jazz.

To paraphrase Miles Davis' famous quote: Genius lies in the notes that Israel Crosby didn't get the chance to play.



THE Lowdown

I WAS THERE!

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

The Beach Boys record *Pet Sounds* in 1966

Has any rock concept album gone further out than *Pet Sounds*, the troubled Beach Boys leader Brian Wilson's finest hour? Subject in its 55-year lifetime to a sequence of reissues, box sets, and learned analyses, the sprawling collection of songs was largely recorded in 1966 by the Wrecking Crew, the elite session musicians who appeared on thousands of hits from the era.

Prominent among them was the bassist Carol Kaye, essentially the godmother of the instrument to James Jamerson's equivalent godfather, who recalled the Hollywood studio sessions in 1998.

"All we heard of [a given song's] melody was Brian sitting down at the piano, playing it and singing it once or twice to give us the feel. The rest of the time he spent in the booth... so we never quite knew how the melody went, and didn't need to know, in relation to the background basic tracks that we recorded.

And it was usually one tune per three-hour session, not the usual four or five tunes per three-hour session that we did with other producers."

She added: "Brian took his time and experimented a lot, changed the arrangement around a lot. He had the bass parts always written out note for note, and had some decent chord charts for everyone else, but also wrote out special parts for the sax players, vibes, or whoever else read some charts too."

Looking back, Kaye describes this unparalleled group of musicians as "youthful spirits all together, with so much energy, so much communion, and that's what music is about—you had people from all races, all religions, all parts of the country, with different ways of thinking and past experiences as professional musicians. That's what everyone hears on those Sixties recordings." ■

Info: www.carolkaye.com



Brian Wilson (in main pic, and at far right here) on the form of his career.



Carol Kaye, to whom we all owe a debt.

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Low Life

Welcome back, bassists! This month, let's dive into the often-mystifying world of confidence. I'm broaching this subject because I'm currently teaching a new cohort of live performers here at BIMM Birmingham, and helping them to adjust to the demands of performing on stage.

It's a massive topic, because performing confidently is easier said than done. The feedback I give on live performance regularly ends in discussions around 'being more confident' or 'projecting confidence', for those who don't naturally possess it. It's important, though, because gig-goers assume bands or artists will give an assured performance, otherwise they won't buy into it. Let's break it down into simple steps to show that confidence is something we can control.

Firstly, acknowledge that confidence is both audible and

visible. We can hear hesitation in someone's playing through a lack of conviction or attack on the notes, by making mistakes, having to correct notes and phrasing, or changing sections tentatively, which suggests a lack of structural knowledge. Knowing your part in extreme detail as well as the song form is crucial to delivering a confident-sounding performance. This is the concept of 'confidence through preparation'.

From a visual standpoint, there are lots of considerations that will produce—or prevent—a confident performance. Look at your

stance, to begin with. If you're completely static, hunched over, closed in posture, or facing away from the audience, this gives you a shy and introverted image. Instead, if we move our head, leg, foot, or whole body with the music, bring our shoulders back to be more open, face the audience and use the stage space more, we start to portray more confidence and energy.

Our gaze is also revealing when it comes to confidence. If we look at the floor or our fretboard, it suggests that we're trying to avoid eye contact with our audience, that we're bored,



Maximize your live bass performance with Tax The Heat bassist and BIMM tutor Antonio Angotti.



BIMM
INSTITUTE

or that we haven't learned the part well enough to look away from our fingers. Instead, try to establish a more efficient fingering of the part with minimal shifting so that you don't have to stay glued to the fretboard. Look up and out, and make eye contact with the rest of the band, which will create both a sense of comradeship and improve communication. Remember, you have control—it's just a case of taking courage in the right way. ■

The Woodshed

WOOD TRENDS EXPLAINED

Don't be terrified by torrefied maple

If you're someone that follows market trends, you've probably noticed that lumber descriptions have expanded to include terms like roasted, caramelized, vulcanized, heat-treated, and torrefied. The appearance of these qualifiers has increased in the descriptions of lumber used for bass, most commonly in maple necks. These terms refer to the same process employed to alter the cellular structure of lumber—high-temperature thermal modification. But what makes heat-treated lumber different from ordinary, kiln-dried lumber?

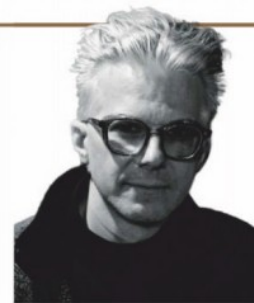
Lumber is hydroscopic, which means that it reacts to changes in atmospheric humidity, readily absorbing water as liquid or vapor. Thermally modified lumber is heat-treated in a torrefaction kiln at temperatures between 374 and 482 degrees Fahrenheit. These very high temperatures cause the natural sugars in lumber to be converted into substances less susceptible

to rot, insects, mold, and fungus, and reduce moisture content to near zero percent.

Conventionally kiln-dried hardwoods have a moisture content between six and eight percent. In the final step of the process, temperature is gradually lowered by controlled steam injection, returning moisture levels to between three and seven percent, which makes it possible for lumber to retain some of its natural flexibility.

The process darkens the natural color of lumber. In the case of maple, this can be anywhere from a honey color to dark brown. Dimensional

stability is improved and the lumber's potential range of moisture variation is also dramatically reduced, resulting in less shrinking, swelling, or warping in response to changes in atmospheric conditions. The improved stability of thermally modified lumber leads many to conclude that it is also stronger—but in fact the opposite is true. Moisture dissipation causes lumber's cells to collapse, resulting in the loss of both strength and pliability. The reduced moisture in the cell structure of thermally modified lumber makes it structurally weaker. Fortunately, this loss



Ace luthier Rob Elrick brings decades of wisdom to the table. Listen up!

is mostly negligible in the thermally modified lumber most often used. Ultimately, the stabilized condition of thermally modified materials can afford more dependable quality in manufacturing, and some believe it may result in stronger resonant qualities.

There is no way to keep moisture completely out of lumber, but thermally modified lumber provides a more stable alternative to other conventional options for limiting movement caused by changes in humidity. And a more stable neck means fewer adjustments—and more time playing bass! ■



Nik Preston takes us through ways to exploit this useful theory

MASTER COOL SUBSTITUTIONS IN TURNAROUNDS: PART 1

Welcome back! Let's look at substitutions this month. We've touched on this subject in previous issues, but this month we're going to look at some fairly basic substitutions used in turnarounds, specifically a I-VI-II-V. We're probably more likely to encounter this sequence in Western music more than any other harmonic movement—other than a I-IV-V or a straight II-V-I.

Turnarounds tend to take up the last two bars of a progression. They provide an element of tension and release which marks the end of the form and the beginning of a new chorus. Think of the last two bars in a 12-bar blues, or the last two bars in a jazz standard. They return to the home key at this point—and then find their way to the V chord in the final bar of the sequence.

Turnarounds provide an element of tension and release which marks the end of the form

Experienced, improvising musicians can and will employ a lot of substitutions in turnarounds, and often these won't even be discussed prior to a performance. It's widely understood that professional musicians will possess an expansive vocabulary built upon a sound knowledge of substitution and reharmonization from which to draw. The exercises here show some of the most common variations of turnarounds, with a brief explanation of the substitutions used.

Each of these options require practice using the methods we have described previously: Chord tones, guide tones, extensions, scale and mode choices, transposition, and so on. The goal here is to make the sound of these familiar, and then to be able to respond instinctively in any key, in any style and anywhere on the fingerboard.

Turnarounds provide some of the fundamental building blocks of harmonic

EXERCISE ONE



EXERCISE TWO



EXERCISE THREE



EXERCISE FOUR



EXERCISE FIVE



resolution, so any time spent familiarizing ourselves with them is very well spent. As always, take it slowly—and make sure you leave the practice room with more options than when you entered it.

Exercise 1 shows a diatonic turnaround in C, while **Exercise 2** shows a diatonic chord family substitution for the I chord. Chord II replaces chord I: Chords I, III and VI are each from the dominant chord family. **Exercise 3** has the II chord substituted for the IV—

drawn from the subdominant family—and **Exercise 4** shows the V chord tritone substituted for a bII chord. So far, these are all techniques we have explored previously, but they will be worth revising if you haven't yet had the chance to make them intuitive. **Exercise 5** shows another option: Replacing the diatonic, VI chord for a resolving, dominant VI chord. This is often employed by jazz and blues players and is in widespread use. More on this next month! ■

Lights. Camera.

Bass!

Interview: Joel McIver **Photography:** Getty, Alamy, Damian Bray

When the music and cinema worlds collide, the results are often questionable. We can all name a long list of musicians who act and actors who play music, and the occasional gem aside, the crossover doesn't usually work. Keanu Reeves tried it, Steve Martin tried it, Jared Leto tried it—and while they all gave it their best shot, there's often something about the actor/musician interface that doesn't feel quite right.

When I interview the actor Jason Momoa, a meeting arranged by our mutual friends at Fender, there's none of that slightly weird overlap. Momoa's

name—or at least, his face—is known to most people because he enjoyed a cinematic hit in 2018 as Aquaman, the DC Comics character, and before that as a warrior called Khal Drogo in HBO's *Game Of Thrones*. His film career is doing just fine, thanks, and for that reason he isn't trying to build a second career as a musician. He doesn't have an album to promote, or any other musical agenda to push, which is what's so refreshing about this interview. The man simply loves bass, using it as an outlet for creativity, honing his mental and physical focus with the instrument, and—as we all do—finding within the low notes a state of flow that takes him away from the everyday world.

Jason Momoa, the movie star who everyone knows thanks to *Game Of Thrones* and *Aquaman*, plays bass every single day. Who knew, right? Well, you read about it here first. He often talks about his admiration for a long list of heavyweight bass players—so, in a world first, we sit down with Momoa and present him with a list of questions from those very bassists. Along the way he reveals his journey into the low end, his admiration for a certain Mr. Claypool—and his profound fear of something that we bassists do all the time...



What's more, Momoa is exactly like the rest of us when it comes to his bass heroes. Mention Les Claypool or Robert Trujillo to him, and he's instantly excited, revealing the Primus and Metallica-loving fanboy behind the imposing 41-year-old. It's an education to witness this transformation, considering that *Aquaman* took over a billion dollars in box-office revenue, and that Momoa is presumably not that easy to impress. If you need evidence, ask him about the music he was into as a teenager—and watch him go.

"Pantera, Rage Against The Machine, Primus, Black Sabbath, Red Hot Chili Peppers," he tells us. "I really, really love John Frusciante and Flea, they're really huge in my life. Tool, too. I listen to pretty much all of it. A lot of the music I search for is a lot more off the beaten path nowadays. I respect everyone out there doing it, because it's so hard and so challenging, and I just try not to judge."

You may have seen pictures of Momoa at musical events such as Slayer's final show in 2019. He's a headbanger to the core, hence our recruitment of the biggest names in that field to ask him questions on the pages you're reading here, but it's important to understand that he's not just into metal. As he says, "I'm really rooted, like one of my gods in music is Tom Waits, but having said that, my goddess is probably Ani DiFranco. I was raised with Miles Davis and Janis Joplin, and Godspeed You! Black Emperor is one of my all-time favorites, too."

In bass terms, though, you only have to mention the late Cliff Burton of Metallica and he's unstoppable. "Oh, let's talk about Cliff!" he laughs. "The first song I'm dedicated to learning is [Burton's 1983 solo piece] 'Anesthesia (Pulling Teeth)'. That's the reason why I have my Rickenbackers, because of him. I fucking love Cliff. He was unbelievable. Did you see [Metallica's new live album] *S&M2*, with the standup bass playing it? Oh my God. I had chicken skin, I was watching it over and over. I thought that was just so beautiful for Cliff. I'm all old Metallica, bro. I probably listen to *Ride The Lightning* and *Kill 'Em All* every week, if not every other day."



It comes as no surprise that Momoa is close to Metallica's current bassist Robert Trujillo. "When's that guy going to teach me how to play bass? Ha ha! He's like my spirit animal, I love him. When I'm with Robert it's like we both came out of the same cave. We're the spitting image, and I absolutely adore him and his son and his family, they're amazing."

Another idol is Les Claypool of Primus, with whom he recently jammed during a visit to Claypool's home. "That was like a childhood dream," he marvels. "We just hit it off. He was playing the drums and I was playing bass and going 'Jesus Christ, man', I was so nervous. Les is like fuckin' God, so it was really hard to relax because he was just playing drums and I was supposed to start filling space and I was like 'Oh my God, what's going on?' I look forward to the day when I can communicate on the bass on that level."

Did Claypool advise Momoa about bass playing, I ask?

"Yeah, I gotta learn a lot of stuff, I taped a bunch that I'll be learning right now. I can't wait to gather more knowledge to be around him and just jam. We had a really great time together, which was a really big relief, because you don't want to meet your heroes and then they're fuckin' assholes. We were having fun, just being fathers and family men. It was super inspiring. I asked him a lot of questions."

I asked him what his hardest song is to play, and if he can still play it. The song 'DMV' is his hardest; he has a very hard time playing it. I got the story behind why he did

these really challenging things, and how he's pissed because now he can't do it on stage!"

Another meaningful aspect of this conversation is that Momoa is slightly out of his comfort zone. "It's my first instrument interview," he tells me right as he picks up the

"Jamming at Les Claypool's house was like a childhood dream. Les is like f*in' God."**

★ AQUAMAN ANSWERS

Jason fields questions from his bass heroes, right here. First up: **Les Claypool of Primus!**

Les: “When I was young I was drawn to the bass because I thought guitar sounded thin and kinda wimpy. The bass, to me, was a much more sultry instrument. I figured by playing bass, it would help me get more ladies. In your experience, has playing bass helped you get the ladies?”

Jason: “Ha ha! Wow. He’s one of my idols, Les. You know, I found my lady [Momoda’s wife Lisa Bonet], and then found the bass. And now I stay with my lady—so there is no ‘ladies’. But you know what there is? There’s one woman and lots of basses.”

Les: “Sound travels 4.5 times faster underwater, therefore the clarity and definition of tone is much more precise. As Aquaman, what piece of music are you most drawn to when at depth?”

Jason: “Primus. One hundred percent.”



Frank Bello, Anthrax

Frank: “Do you get the same high when you’re jamming bass to a great song as you do when you finish acting a cool scene?”

Jason: “Definitely, but I really use bass as a tool to help me be calm, and to not sit in my mind too much. It’s much like a painter, probably—to get to disappear into a kind of space that isn’t like time. I love being in that state of mind. I feel like it’s ageless, and it’s fun, the more I can learn about music theory, which I’d like to spend more time with—learning that language. Bass is like a moving meditation. I love it and I love the way the bass sounds, even when it’s not plugged in.”



Rex Brown, Pantera, Down, Kill Devil Hill

Rex: “What type of sound do you go for? Fat and distorted, or clean and robust?”

Jason: “More distortion. I have a couple of pedals that I experiment with, but it depends on what I’m playing. If I’m doing something Claypool-sounding, or something that’s like Flea, I don’t have it distorted. I love it all, man.”



Robert Trujillo, Metallica



Robert: “Jason, what is your earliest memory of getting excited about the sound of the bass guitar?”

Jason: “Actually, it’s funny when I think back on it. My very first album that I ever bought with my own money was *The Uplift Mofo Party Plan* by the Red Hot Chili Peppers. The second album that I ever bought was *Sailing The Seas Of Cheese* by Primus. For me, it was skateboarding that got me into those bands. I was a really big skateboarder

“The Uplift Mofo Party Plan and Sailing The Seas Of Cheese still get played monthly”

back then, I was super, super into it. I’ve always been into it my whole life, and so that was my introduction to that particular kind of funk sound. When it came to listening to bass, everything was consumed by Flea and Claypool. There it is, that sound, and still to this day, both of those albums get played monthly. Even if they came out today they’d still hold sway.”

Robert: “Do you have an interest in writing and scoring one of your own films someday, or any film for that matter?”

Jason: “You know what, I absolutely do. I work very, very closely with my composers, and what’s interesting to me is that the way that we communicate is very much like the way musicians communicate. We’ll talk about different keys, we’ll talk about different food, and about colors. Ultimately it’s all very much connected through music.”

★ Players

JASON MOMOA

phone, which is important because—no disrespect intended to our colleagues in the film-magazine world—he’s now answering questions that he’s never answered before. This leads us very quickly into profoundly emotional territory.

“You know what?” he ponders when I ask him how he got into funk and metal bass playing. “I grew up really, really poor, and my mom worked frickin’ four jobs. I didn’t have any money, so I never could get a guitar or a bass. I come from a very small town in Iowa where there was no-one playing bass like that or listening to music like that. I discovered that music by going out to a skateboard park in Nebraska and hearing it. That cool

“I was jamming Tool with my kids. The moment I put a bass on, I could just feel the connection”

counterculture of skateboarding helped me find those things, because I did not find them in my home town.”

A key moment in Momoa’s bass trajectory came fairly recently, he tells us. He was already a guitar player, but bass really came to the fore at this point. “We were on the set of *Aquaman*. I always have instruments on the set, so my son was playing drums and my daughter was playing guitar. It was my assistant’s birthday, and she really loves Tool, so I borrowed a bass from my buddy and we all played ‘Sober’ for her. Right then, my passion for bass really exploded. The moment I put it on, I could just feel the connection—and it was all over.”



He continues: “I always knew I wanted to play bass. After that I wanted to play standup, so I bought one and now it’s a passion for me, with how it makes me feel and how it sounds. I studied and studied and studied bass, and I was like ‘My God, I wish I would have done this when I was young’. I wish that I had that opportunity—but I’m making up for lost time.”

You won’t find much video online of Momoa playing bass on an actual professional stage, although there’s tons of him jamming casually backstage and on set. There is, however, some fan-filmed footage of him doing an impromptu gig or two with friends. For such a well-known actor, it’s quite a revelation when he tells us that he found the experience very uncomfortable indeed.

“You know, I went on stage the other day with my friends and I was terrified. It’s funny, because I should be fine with playing on stage, but I was absolutely terrified getting on stage and playing with them, because I never really wanted to do that. Really—I was absolutely terrified. I’m not really a fan of it. But my friends, they love to have me up there, and I love supporting them, but I’m just like, ‘Oh, man... Stick to your craft’.

Has he acted in theatre, and if so does that overlap with playing music?

“No, bro, no. I’ve never done theatre. I stay the fuck away from it. I don’t like being on stage, man. A lot of my friends are theatre guys and they love it, because it’s the actor’s medium, but I like the characters and the camera finding me, dude.”

He goes on: “What I love about the film-making process is that it’s pretty much everything else—the music, the editing, producing, getting the money, seeing it all the way through. You work with the talent, you

★ AQUAMAN ANSWERS

Tom Araya, Slayer

Tom: “Would you ever take a break from acting to do a full album cycle tour with a band?”

Jason: “Oh man. A lot of my friends are musicians and I love them, and I feel like it’s fine for them to be actors, but I don’t know, when I see actors being musicians I’m like, ‘Oh my God’. It’s just like ‘Ugh...’ It never really works out. It’s all good, and I would never want to say ‘I’ll never do anything’. I enjoy playing up there with my friends if they’re raising money for a charity, of course, because it’s always good to help—but I feel very out of place up there.”



David Ellefson, Megadeth



David: “I’m curious if a longer, 35” scale neck would work better with your larger hands?”

Jason: “I play on everything. I don’t let my hand size stop me from playing anything. Right now I’m doing mandolin and ukulele, so it’s always a bitch transferring from one instrument to the next, but I enjoy everything. I play bass every day, I play guitar every day, when I’m away from my family, and when I’m on the set, because I constantly like to be in my right side of my brain.”

understand everyone’s positives and you bring them up to a higher level. I love the whole idea of film-making, but I would say acting is not at the top of my list in that whole process. When you really look at theater it’s definitely the actor’s medium. It’s 100 percent that.”

He pauses to reflect, before adding: “You know, it’s sad to say that I haven’t challenged myself to that level yet. Maybe some day I will, but right now I’m writing all the things I want to do, and I’m making the movies and working with the directors that I want to, and the cinematographers that I want to. That one play where I go, ‘Oh I just have to do that’ just hasn’t happened in my life yet.”

The bass players among you who enjoy a greater height than average will grasp Momoa’s next point pretty easily. “I’m six-four, six-five,” he says. “I don’t like being looked at, and I get looked at a lot. On the stage you’re big, and you’re up there, and everyone’s staring at you—and I don’t like it. I walk into a room and I slouch a bit.”

Maybe a period of rehearsal would help, I suggest, which is the right thing to say, because Momoa cheers up. “Listen,” he says confidently, “that was my first time playing a song on stage, and I’m sure more practice will make me feel really comfortable. Ultimately, if I practised with my friends, and actually did something where I could participate instead of being on the spot, it would be better.”



THE BIG F

Jason recently ordered a beautiful custom Fender Precision. He and Fender Master Builder Vincent Van Trigt tell the story...

Photography: Damian Bray

That’s a sweet bass that Vincent made for you, Jason. How did it come about?

Jason: “Oh, bro. It’s perfect. Amazing. Vince had made three of those, I think, and I was like, ‘Are those for sale? They’re so beautiful, I’ve never seen anything like that!’ but he said, ‘No, they’re gone’. I was like ‘Damn it. Will you please make me one?’ and he did.”

Vincent, talk to us about that bass.

Vincent: “For NAMM 2020, I made all the bass models I ever wanted, about 10 of them, and posted about them on Instagram. I got a lot of good reactions, and Jason contacted me through Instagram and said, ‘Hey, I like what you do—we gotta make some basses’. It was very unexpected, and incredibly cool. The first bass we worked on was a pink ‘61 Jazz, which was a fun project because

he wanted it beat up a lot. He really inspired me to go a little further and come up with new ideas. He had bought an original 1968 Telecaster bass and he loved the body, but the neck was a little thick for his liking, so he asked if I could make another neck for it, which was also a fun project. When I delivered the Jazz and the neck, that was the first time I met him. With the Precision bass that we’re talking about here, I had made one similar to that before for a Japanese customer, and again I posted about it on Instagram and Jason liked it, so we went off of that one, an Aged Blonde 1959 Precision.”

Jason: “I think the world of Vince. Seeing what goes into making an instrument like that... It’s a painting. A beautiful painting that makes an even better sound.”

Instagram: @vincevantrigt_fender

The gig he’s talking about does sound a touch stressful. “Yeah! They were like, ‘You’re gonna come up on stage, otherwise we’re gonna chant your name and everyone’s gonna make you come up, and it’s just gonna be awkward’. I didn’t want to bring any more tension to the situation, so I was like ‘Guys, I don’t wanna go up’. But they’re like ‘You’re gonna come up’, so I was like ‘Fuck!’ and I started having a panic attack. You wouldn’t think I’d have a panic attack, but yeah, I get anxiety about it. So if I did

practise, it would be beautiful. I mean, you never know.”

I tell him that maybe he should take a year off acting and tour with a band, maybe calling it Jason and the Argonauts. Why not?

“Ha ha! You know what? I’m gonna do that, and you know what, maybe in a year you’re gonna call back and go ‘Jason, guess what, you’re an actor that plays in a band’ and I’ll be like ‘Oh fuck, I’m a cliché. Goddammit. We’re Jason Momoa and the Clichés!’”

Instagram: @prideofgypsies

GET CARTER...

...on your session, if you want the ultimate double bass performance. “I’ll take a bullet if I’m wrong,” says the great **Ron Carter**, 83 years old and kicking the asses of bass players a third his age.

Words: Joel McIver **Photography:** Getty

If your life’s achievements add up to a quarter of what Ron Carter has done in his career so far, you’ll have led a first-class sojourn on this planet.

Recognized as a Commandeur de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, a major cultural honor in France, and a prestigious award no matter where you happen to live, Carter has a bewildering array of data on his resumé.

We can talk endlessly about the 2,200-plus recordings that he’s completed, for which he’s earned a Guinness Book Of Records award; we can discuss his classical background and education, or his immersion in New York’s never-more-swinging jazz scene in the Sixties. We would be remiss if we didn’t mention Miles Davis, in whose immortal second Quintet he played alongside Herbie Hancock and Tony Williams; his roles as an educator and prolific author; and the long series of solo and collaborative albums which Carter continues to release to this day.

In the interests of space, though, we’ll focus on Ron Carter in 2021—how he views the art of the double bass, how he looks after himself, and which challenges he faces. Believe us, this man deserves the entire magazine, not just these six pages.

As our Zoom call begins, we’re struck by how stern Carter is, like the terrifying school headteacher you used to fear as a teenager. A few minutes in, though, this melts away, and he starts dropping in surreal humor that has us both laughing. The man is keenly aware of the gravity of his position as the bandleader/bassist of his generation, and—while sticking to a single message of being the best you can possibly be—knows how erratic the music industry can be, especially in current conditions.

Mr. Carter, you’ve been a professional bass player since 1959, when you were 22. What are your priorities in 2021?

I have a level of expectation about my performance every night. I expect to play the best I can. I hope that the band is aware of what’s going on, and that the guy who’s no longer behind the palm tree is giving them a free harmony lesson every night. If I can get them to comprehend those possibilities, then I think my night has been made. I’ve always felt that I’m on these gigs because someone told me I can help these people, whoever they are, and whatever the project is. I’ve always gone into a project wanting to make the guy miss me when I’m not there.

How have you evolved as a bass player in recent years?

I’m playing better, man. I understand how the bass works, and I’m playing every day. I’m working on the books in my library. I’ve kinda gotten into another location in my head where I realize what the bass can do for bands, how it affects the band, whatever it is, and how I think I’d better learn the bass physically and become more comfortable with my discoveries. That allows me to take those discoveries in another direction, that leads to more discoveries somewhere else.

How have you specifically improved—tonally, or with your note choices?

Note choices, and where I use them, and who gets to sample them, and who doesn’t, ha ha!

They’re important choices, and the more I listen to my environment, the more I put these choices in play. Sometimes these are great choices, and sometimes they are less than great.

Some observers of jazz believe that it’s less of a thriving scene than it used to be. Do you agree?

Not at all. Of course, everything changes, and it’s all relative. It’s like saying that because at some point, cars were only made in a certain color, that they’re no longer viable, or that a particular model is no longer good because the paint job isn’t the same as it was 10 years ago. So I’m not a fan of the ‘jazz is dead’ movement. I never have been. I resent those people who have the audacity to tell me that my life’s work is dead, and if I see them I will tell them that personally. Having said that, jazz has never gotten the top line of the advertizing money. There’s always been something else, whether that is new cars, or new blues, or the latest group from London

or New York. We, the community, have never gotten the kind of acclaim as if we were somebody else doing something else. The music has managed to survive, though—that’s what

you should tell those people who think less of it. We’re not troglodytes or Jurassic Park animals, man, ha ha! We’re living and breathing and changing every day.

What challenges do you face these days?
The biggest challenge is playing good every

“I’ve always gone into a project wanting to make the guy miss me when I’m not there”



Composer, bandleader, sideman, author, educator, and even a model for the elite Japanese suit-makers F-One, there is little that Ron Carter has not done.



Carter with Miles Davis and Wayne Shorter in London in 1967.

night. The next biggest challenge is when the bass is not responding as I hear it responding. The third biggest challenge is getting through the day with the turbulent things we're forced to see on a daily basis. I need to put those things far enough back in the rear-view mirror to be able to play that night with people, and give them my complete, undivided attention, given the daily events that make that almost impossible to do. The fourth biggest challenge is getting a ticket for parking my car where I shouldn't have parked it, ha ha! Here I am, pushing a bass down the street on wheels, because my car is no longer where I parked it...

How do you prepare for a live performance?

It depends on what the situation is. If I'm the bandleader, and I'm working at a club for a week, I'll plan the set. I write it out and get to the soundcheck in the afternoon, and the band knows that they have six nights to get this stuff right. There'll be no surprises, no sneak attacks, no altering of the programme just to mess with them. I've been on those kinds of gigs, where the bandleader would slip a song in or change the key or change the programme order with tunes that we hadn't rehearsed. I thought that was a waste of time and a waste of talent, and clearly an effort to embarrass the band, individually and collectively.

What are your goals as a bandleader?

I try to prepare the band for a story, and the story has whatever colors they want to bring to the print, but they still tell the story. That's my first goal. My second goal is to lead the

band in the direction that I think the music can tolerate that night. My third goal is, can they tolerate it? Not only that, can they understand what I'm trying to do with it? Have they heard that chorus before? Here comes this thing again two choruses later. Will they accept my view? If this is the top of the tune, I don't know where the fuck you guys are. Will I have that confidence that wherever they are, they know I'll take the bullet if I'm wrong? And if they're wrong, can I have the kind of confidence in them that they have in me? The last thing is that I wish them well in the course of the night, because we're doing this together. Hopefully my note choices and my comments to them will be taken as an attempt to get the maximum out of their talent and my leadership—and none of that shit is personal, man.

Does all this mean that you're a tough bandleader?

It's all relative. If a parent says, 'Don't put your hand in the fire' and saves your life, is he being a tough parent? Or if he accepts that you will learn after enough times of touching a pan that is too hot, is that tough? I don't know. You'd have to ask the sidemen I work with how they would qualify my leadership.

What kind of man was Miles Davis?

Miles was great. He never told me what not to play. He trusted me to pay the band off, he

trusted me to check the reservations for the hotel, all that kind of stuff. We would talk about things that were not musical—politics, sports. He trusted me with stuff that he maybe hadn't found in anybody in that band, to convey his non-musical thoughts. We never talked about musicians or tunes, specifically. Our relationship was as non-musical as a leader and a sideman could have, especially when the leader was that famous. We'd never talk about changes, we'd never talk about tempo—that wasn't part of what he chose to share with me. He'd say 'Let's go to a driving range and drive golf balls for an hour' or we'd go the gym and work out. We'd talk about physical maintenance of your body, and health in general. So that was my relationship with him.

Talking of physical fitness, how do you stay in shape these days?

I've had a trainer come to my home for the past 30 years at five AM, three days a week. We do some stretching and some free weights for an hour, and he's in charge. I get up at 4.55 AM, open the door at five, and we work until six. Right now I'm doing push-ups and sit-ups with a 25-pound weight on my chest.

How do you keep your hands and fingers in bass-playing condition?

Just practice. I'm not a fan of people who specialize in those kinds of things. When I was coming up at college, I'd watch piano players

“Miles Davis never told me what to play. We'd never talk about changes or tempo.”



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Carter in full flow: "I'm giving you all I have because I think I can help you with your project."

tapping out imaginary notes on table tops, and I'd ask them why they were doing that. They told me they wanted to develop their strength and their chops for their Handel etudes and so on. I said, 'But what kind of sound do you get when you bang on the table top?'

So, no finger exercises?

Personally, I don't squeeze rubber balls or anything like that. People think it takes a lot of strength to play the bass, and people who feel like that will have you squeezing real hard on the neck and holding the bass real tight. Generally, it's people who don't play the bass for long sets who don't realize that you can't survive doing that for three sets a night at 50 minutes a set, or whatever your gig is. I've run across a lot of doctors and surgeons in my time who are jazz musicians or jazz followers, and we've decided that these exercises exacerbate the onset of early arthritis, because you're moving the cartilage between each knuckle and wearing it out way before its time. I've never been involved in specific exercises, standing, sitting or playing the bass, that I thought would make the bass easier to play. What makes the bass easier to play is knowing the fuckin' instrument, ha ha! There may be a better way to phrase that for your readers, but if you find a better way, don't tell me to tell you.

Believe me, that's perfect for our readers. Knowing the instrument is only achieved through years of practice, I assume?

Yeah. I'm still doing it, man. I'm teaching 10 students a week and I've written a series of books on how I think about the bass, and how my broad process allows me to find the notes that I find. It's that kind of ongoing personal research that has allowed me to continue what I do.

What has been your best work, as you see it?

I'm still looking for that day.

It's still ahead of you, then?

Yes, absolutely. We spend hours wondering how to get the right note if we play an F# on the D string, and what notes are here when I'm moving around, and we work on this general concept in various forms all the time. If I realize that my first finger on the G string is C, and over here is E flat or E natural, then I've been playing these notes all wrong for a long time, and I just found it this night. This awareness always takes place. I'm stunned if I find a different set of notes than I found last week. I think 'How is that possible? Check that out!

Okay—next tune!' I can't just roll around on the grass, man, I've got to get the fuck up and get going! Ha ha!

Your most recent album, *Remember Love* (2018), was recorded as a bass and sax duo with Houston Person.

Yeah, man. He's one of the few people I've played with who knows every verse of the song. And I'm one of the few people he knows who doesn't know but three!

The music sounds effortless. Is the advantage of playing in a duo that you have space to move?

The advantages and disadvantages are about even, but I don't look at it like that—I look at it like, I'm gonna work with this sax player, and how can I convince him that it's me, and that I can play these different changes that don't belong to this tune? I can't talk him into it, because I've already hit the first chord. Did I set it up right so he knows what's coming? If I feel he doesn't like them, and he's not responding, am I able to shift back to an non-convertible automobile and get him what he thinks he needs? I got something for him, if he'll let me show it to him.

When you put it like that, it doesn't sound effortless after all.

It's always work, man. Everything we do, whether it's with two, or three, or 16 musicians, it's a job. It's a lot of work. If you're under the delusion that it's just like falling off a log, well, remember that falling off a log is dangerous too.

Many of us imagine that there is a level of virtuosity where everything is easy.

Let me know when I get there!

Are there any weak areas of your playing that you work on?

I never say it out loud if I do.

Let me rephrase: Which areas of your playing do you work on?

All of them. Intonation, note choice, hand position, how I'm holding the bass, how I can tune up between tunes, how I can tune up during the course of a tune, does the bass feel too high tonight or does it feel too low, are the strings higher or lower depending on the weather and the air-conditioning in the

club... Some of these factors are out of my control, but I make a point of being aware of them. It's like fixing

an airplane while you're flying it. Sometimes the bass responds quickly enough, sometimes it doesn't even feel like your bass. Weak points show up everywhere. Whatever mine are, it's

for me to know and for you to find out, as they used to say in the old days. Ha ha!

What is your preferred bass gear?

La Bella 7710 black nylonwound strings—I've used those for 30 years—and a wonderful bass rosin by Weidoeft. I have David Gage pickups and my bass is a 1910 Juzek that I borrowed \$100 to buy in 1959. It's on all but maybe three of those records that you have in your library. I had an extension put on in 1969—that was the first one.

Does it require much maintenance?

No more than I do.

Do you ever play bass guitar?

Not at all. I haven't touched one in more years than I care to remember. I've got my hands full with the double bass. It takes up all my attention, and it has done for a very long time. Playing electric bass would take time away from my ultimate goal, which is to play good every night.

Are you ever disappointed with your performance?

The last time was 1965... No, I can't answer that question. Ha ha! I gave my best on all those attempts. I can ask no more from anyone else but that. I tell people 'Don't fool around, you've only got one take and this is a serious business'—whatever it takes to give them my view. I'm not there to socialize: I'm giving you all I have because I think I can help you with your project. My job is to present that to you the best I can. So if there are weak moments in my concept or my playing or I missed a note, it wasn't because I didn't have the right effort in mind or that I didn't get to the right point in time in the music, or the bandleader didn't have enough verbal skills to tell me whatever he or she wanted. I go to these dates because this person thought I could help them. My job is to leave them feeling that I helped them.

You don't compromise?

No—one in my band is allowed to do that. Ever. 'Good enough' is a terrible phrase. You wouldn't tell a classical musician to settle for good enough. Why would you think that it's acceptable to look at me and say 'Hey man, that's close enough for jazz'. Fuck you! Get out of here. We're not listening to that today. Absolutely not.

That's a rare thing, in my experience.

Well, I don't know what bands you work with—but if you're in my band, you bring that shit with you! ■

Info: <https://roncarter.net>,
<https://roncarterbooks.com>

“My best work? I'm still looking for that day.”

ENTER THE DEAD ZONE

We chronicle the return of the long-lost 1974 Alembic bass, known as ‘Osiris’ aka ‘Mission Control’ by Deadheads, and ‘The Osage’ or ‘The Omega’ by Alembic faithful, once belonging to **Phil Lesh** of the Grateful Dead

Words: Joel McIver, Jason Scheuner **Photography:** Lisa S Johnson, James Katz, Dave Stotts, Ed Perlstein/Getty

Just about any Deadhead is familiar with the Phil Lesh bass known as ‘Mission Control’. What is hazy are many of the details, as this bass seemed to simply disappear over 40 years ago. This astounding custom Alembic bass, with serial number 74 00008, was played by Lesh on stage with the Grateful Dead from June 16, 1974 until July 1, 1979, and was hand-built at Alembic by luthier Rick Turner. Only the eighth instrument built by Alembic, Turner started it in 1972 and completed it in mid-1974. ‘Osiris’, aka ‘Mission Control’, ‘Osage Orange’ or ‘The Omega’, was built not just for, but as part of, the band’s historic Wall Of Sound.

The significance of the Wall Of Sound, another brainchild of Alembic co-founder Owsley ‘Bear’ Stanley III, cannot be overstated. This grand audio experiment spawned the modern PA system, and set

a standard still unmatched today. However, that is only part of the story of this bass and its builders at Alembic. This instrument and a handful of its contemporaries set the stage for the modern ‘boutique’ instrument. Consider the construction of this bass, beyond its exotic

“Used by Phil Lesh at over 250 Grateful Dead shows, the Mission Control bass has become iconic”

inlays and electronics. When this instrument was built, you could count on two hands the number of instruments built this way. It featured laminated neck-thru construction, coupled with sandwiched, exotic tone wood wings known as ‘The Hippie Sandwich’. These techniques, pioneered by the builders

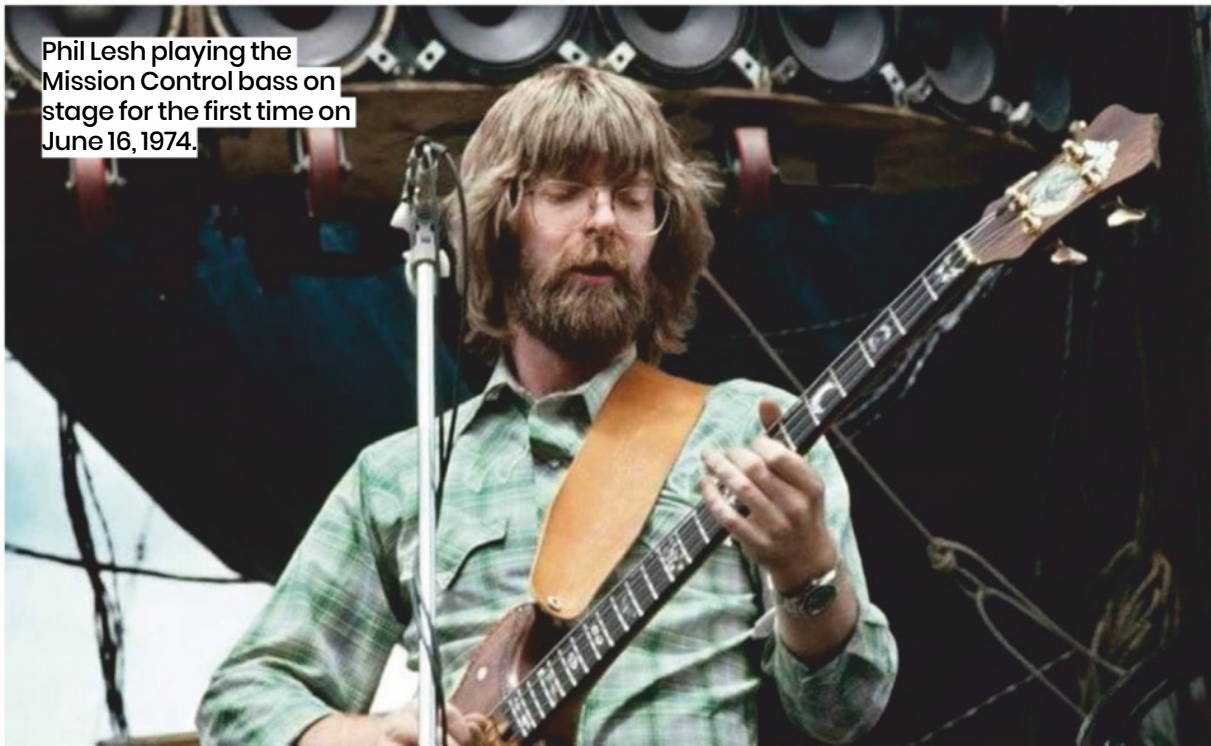
at Alembic, have paved the way for countless luthiers and instruments that now use these elements as the standard for today’s boutique instrument. Jerry Garcia’s Wolf guitar, built by Luthier Doug Irwin in 1972 to 1973, featured the same type of construction, and was also used with the Wall Of Sound. Irwin also came from the Alembic tree of luthiers.

Used by Lesh at over 250 Grateful Dead shows in that five-year period, the Mission Control bass became iconic in its own right, with *Rolling Stone* magazine featuring the instrument in an Alembic article in September 1973. It was also featured in its own scene in *The Grateful Dead Movie* the following year. It was used at the hiatus comeback show at the Great American Music Hall in 1975, and the Day On The Green show in 1976, as well as the May 8, 1977 gig at Cornell University—possibly their best-known performance.

Osiris even visited the Great Pyramid in Egypt, where it was played during the lunar eclipse, in September 1978; it also closed down the famous Winterland Ballroom not once, but twice, in 1974 and 1978. The bass was also used to track *Mars Hotel* (1974), *Blues For Allah* (1975), *Terrapin Station* (1977), and the *Shakedown Street* 1978 studio albums, as well as countless live releases.

Its specifications are extravagant, with red and green LED dot markers in the neck—quite a rarity back then. In fact, they were only the third set ever installed, after David Crosby’s set in 1970 and a set in Alembic 72 01 for Jack Casady in 1972—all three sets still work. Turner carved the top and back from Hawaiian koa wood, which is prized for its tone, and formed the wings from mahogany core and maple and walnut veneers.

Phil Lesh playing the Mission Control bass on stage for the first time on June 16, 1974.



A close-up of the Mission Control body over a tie dye of the same vintage by Courtenay Pollock, who made all the tie dyes for the Wall Of Sound. Pic: Jason Scheuner





A close-up shot of the walnut and brass 'Batwing' tailpiece and the knobs for one channel of the Alembic SF-2 Super Filter.

The ebony fingerboard is covered in 11 different exotic inlays. For the record, these are:

- Mother-of-pearl lightning bolts striking lapis lazuli
- An abalone serpent eating its own tail
- A mother-of-pearl crescent moon
- An abalone lizard
- An abalone Darkstar
- Mother-of-pearl and abalone stars
- An abalone bat
- An abalone infinity symbol
- A mother-of-pearl and abalone Saturn
- Abalone kissing fish, as Lesh is a Pisces
- More mother-of-pearl lightning bolts striking lapis lazuli.

The headstock is overlaid with Brazilian rosewood on both sides, and the inlays are made of mother-of-pearl, abalone, brass, opal, lapis lazuli, and even hashish.

Rick Turner crafted the neck-thru portion from seven laminates of three different types of lumber—walnut, maple, and Osage orange wood, a Midwestern US tree that is hard as a rock. Luthiers regard it as a fabulous building material for necks.

The mother-of-pearl fingerboard inlays are a series of mystical symbols. The design on the headstock incorporates the Alembic logo and the Dead's 'Steal Your Face' skull and lightning bolt, both designed by Owsley 'Bear' Stanley III. In the light, the 'Hand Of Man' portion of the Alembic logo sends a beam of

“There’s even a natural phantom skull hiding deep within the mother-of-pearl”

light or energy into the 'Steal Your Face' skull portion—a remarkable display of Turner's handiwork. The cloud portion of the logo representing the Universe even has a natural phantom skull hiding deep within the mother-of-pearl.

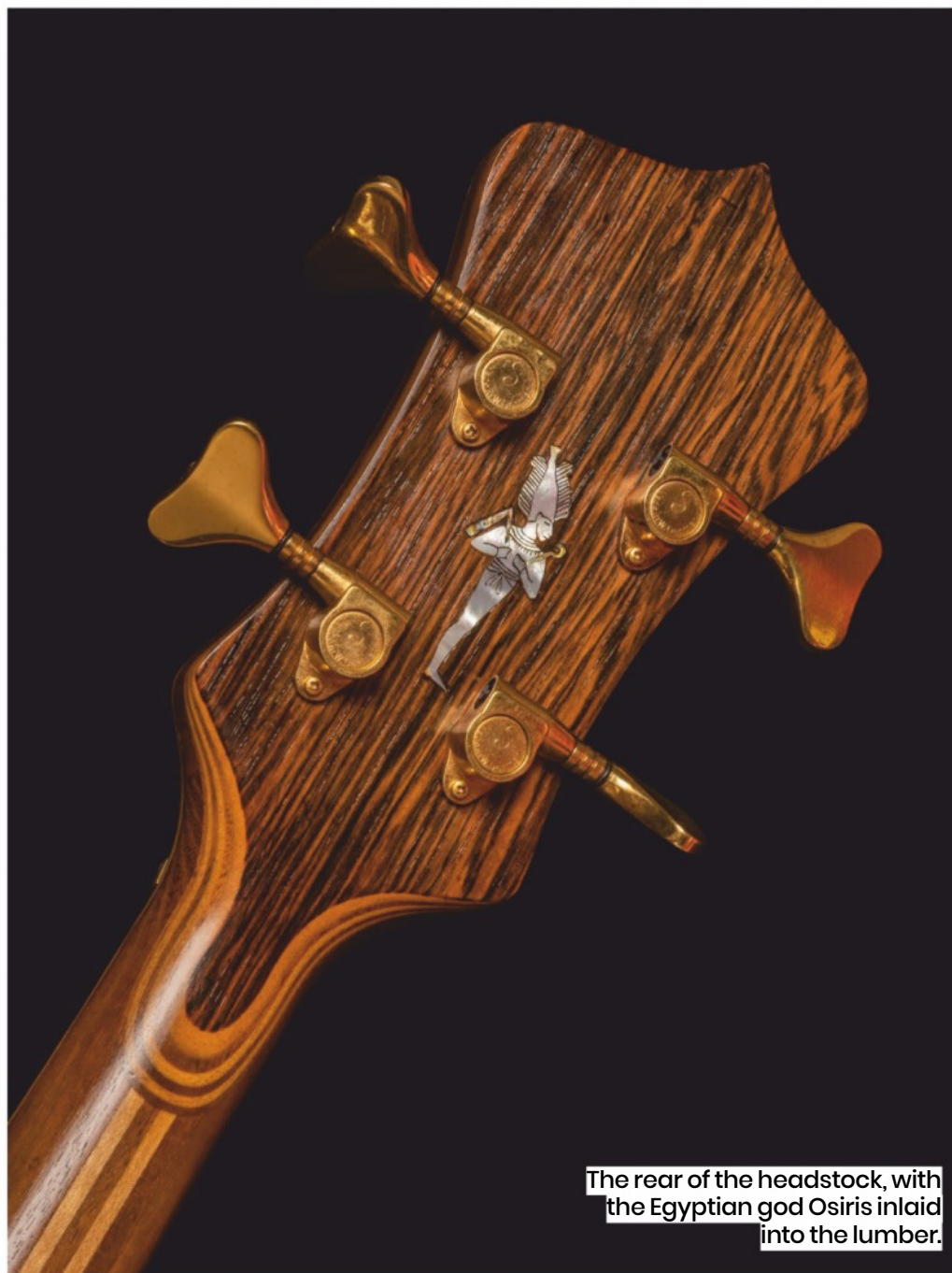
Two abalone and mother-of-pearl stars are inlaid on the lower half of the bass, each surrounded by five knobs controlling various tone settings and filters. There is a fantastic mother-of-pearl and abalone 'Osiris' inlay on the back of the headstock, revealing where

this bass gets one of its names. There were also 10 small push-button switches under ivory discs, which Turner says were mostly for the ability to send each string to four separate stacks of nine 15" speaker cabinets, each powered by a stack of McIntosh amps in the Wall Of Sound.

The original groundbreaking electronics were made by Lesh's colleague George Mundy, as an early version of the Alembic Super Filter, designed by Ron Wickersham, and have now been upgraded to the current SF-2 version for less noise and weight. Each knob still does exactly what it did in 1974. Mundy was tracked down for consultation, and gave his blessing on the updates.

Rick Turner tells us: "George got deeply into it; he really put a lot into that instrument. I think his side of that bass probably cost like \$30,000 [around \$200,000 in 2021] back then. You could buy a house with what Phil paid for that bass. Les Paul once came to a Grateful Dead show to check out the electronics—the crew thought his name was on the guest list as a joke until he showed up. We popped the back off the bass and showed him the insides. He loved it."

The front and back in all their glory. These and more images will feature in Lisa S. Johnson's forthcoming book, *Immortal Axes*, due out in fall 2021 on Princeton Architectural Press.



The rear of the headstock, with the Egyptian god Osiris inlaid into the lumber.

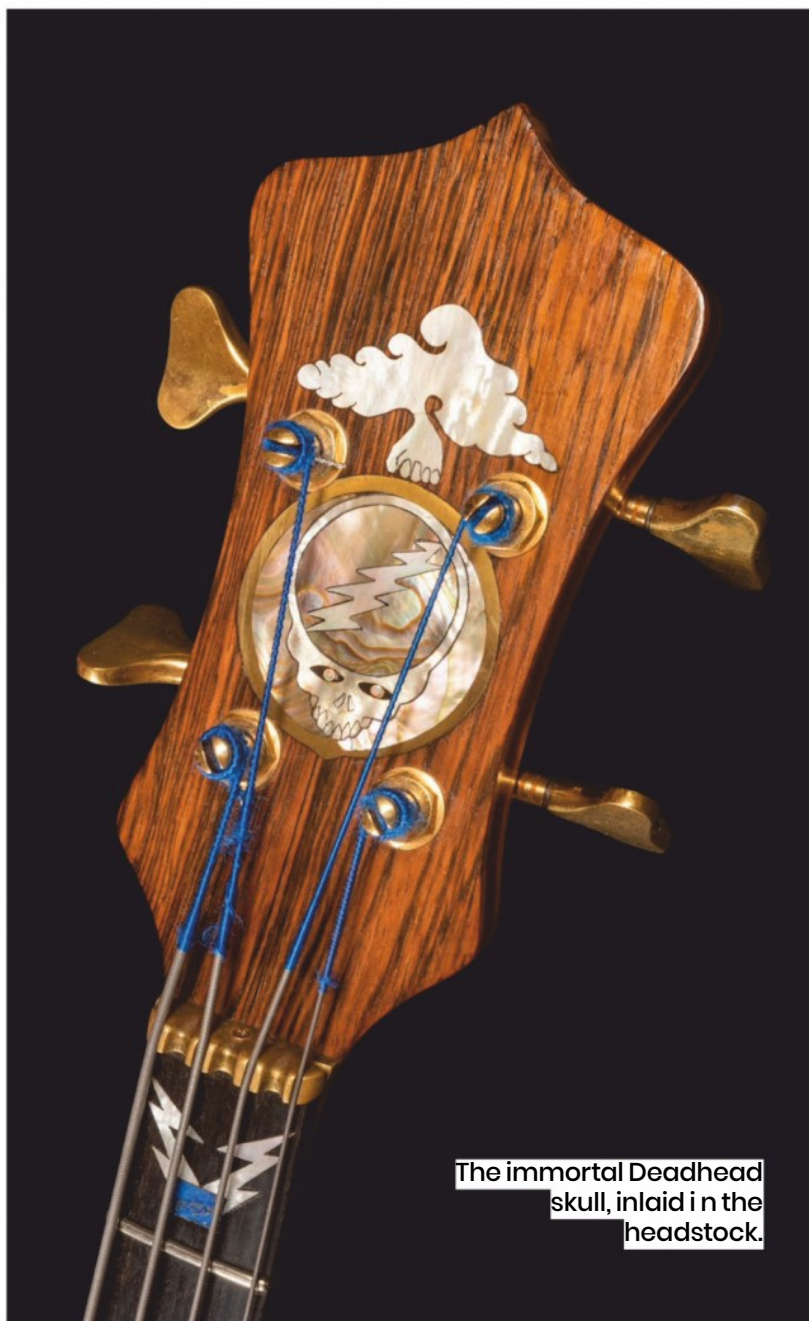


Notice the detail here of the seven-piece neck-thru portion.

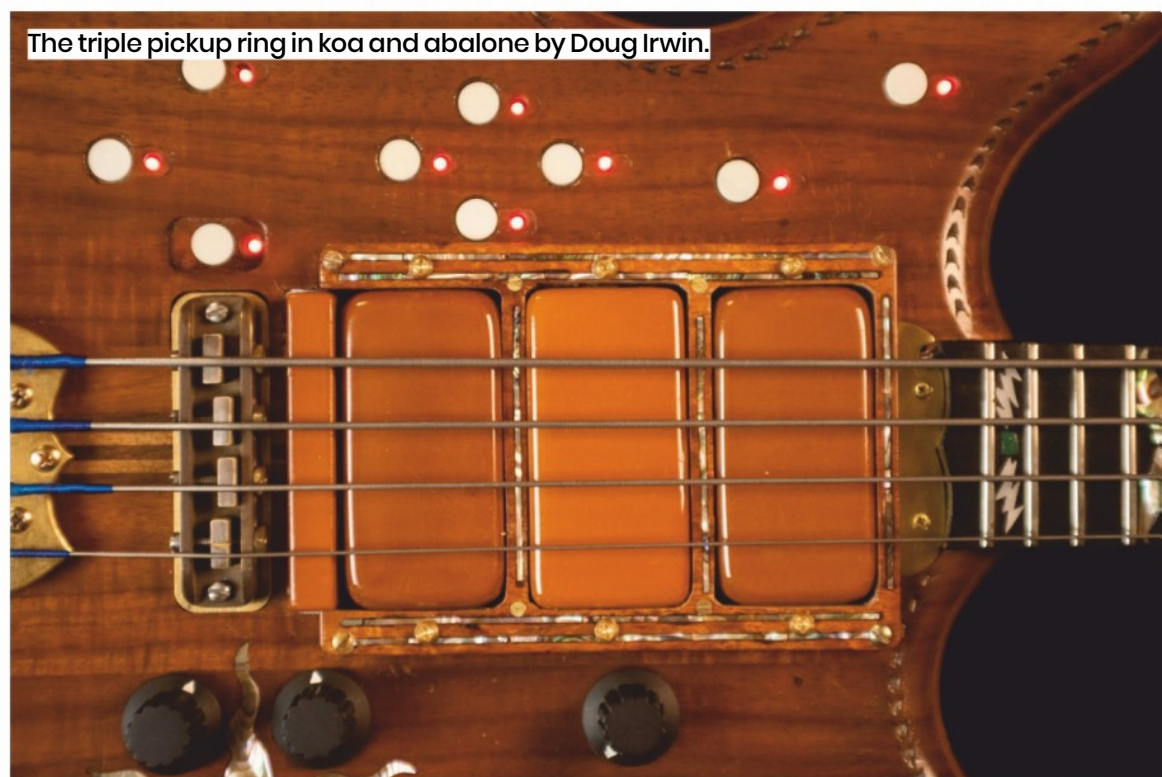
Pictures: Lisa Johnson



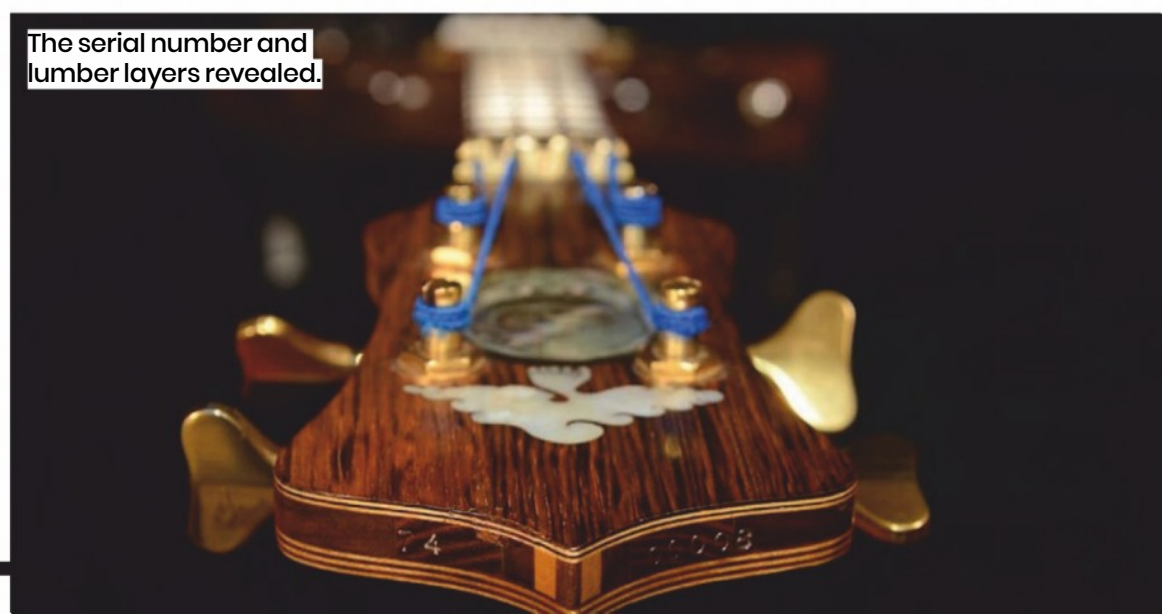
Details of the LED lights, the custom Ray Raydecker cable, and custom beaded strap by Jenny Lowe.



The immortal Deadhead skull, inlaid in the headstock.

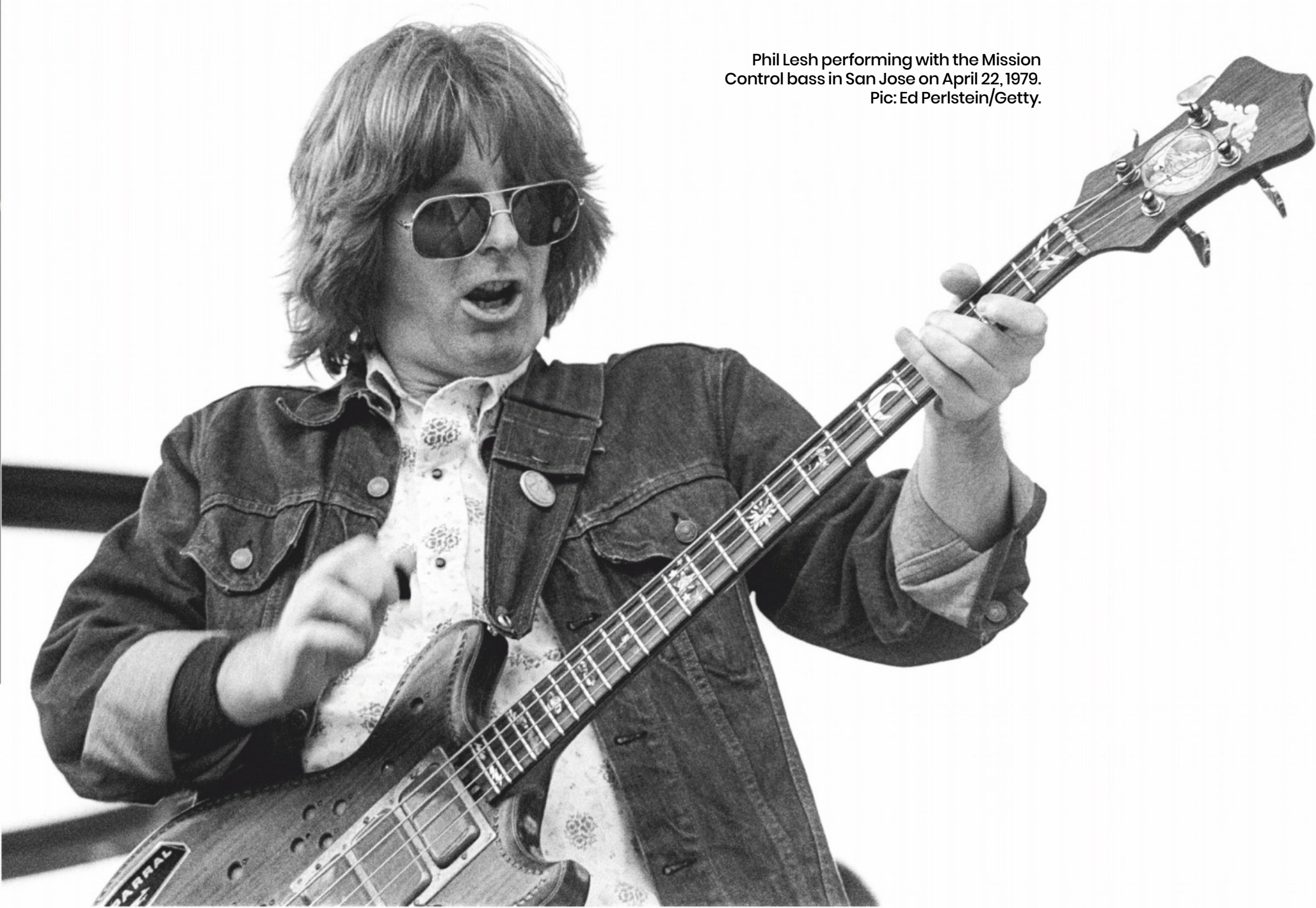


The triple pickup ring in koa and abalone by Doug Irwin.



The serial number and lumber layers revealed.

Phil Lesh performing with the Mission Control bass in San Jose on April 22, 1979.
Pic: Ed Perlstein/Getty.



There are low impedance-wide aperture neck and bridge pickups, as well as a thin 'quad' pickup placed between the bridge and bridge pickup for maximum string separation, each with dedicated outputs. During the restoration, Jason Scheuner, the bass's current owner, tracked down the original neck and bridge pickups over 40 years after they were removed from the bass, while accurate replicas of the quad unit, hum-cancelling coils and batwing tailpiece have been built and installed by Turner in 2020. The red LED indicator lights have been restored next to the ivoroid buttons by Turner as well.

As a final touch, Turner also provided an era-correct Alembic 'U-channel' bridge that came off one of Stanley Clarke's personal basses from 1973-75. The aim has been to undo some radical modifications which the bass underwent in 1980 by an overzealous roadie, before it was misplaced for over 40 years, and to make it as close to the original as possible, as well as to create a detailed timeline of the history of Mission Control.

After the roadie had removed the original pickups and electronics, he returned the bass and associated items to Equipment Room #4 at the Dead's studio in San Rafael. Following frontman Jerry Garcia's death in 1995, the bass was moved to a storage locker, which was subsequently defaulted and bought by a salvage company in 2014. They sold it to Gruhn Guitars in Nashville, who performed the structural repairs, installed the new Alembic Super Filter, and then sold it to Scheuner in December 2019, who completed the restoration with Turner in 2020.

Given its provenance, and the spectacular restorations that have gone into it, what does the future hold for the Mission Control bass? As Scheuner says, "The last couple of details to wrap up are to combine the two five-pin outputs currently on the bass to a 50-year-old NOS LEMO 3 connector provided by George Mundy, and to return the plate where the five-pin output for the Quad pickup currently resides to a historically accurate brass and koa plate, housing the fine adjust for the pickup

volumes. Nobody really owns a treasure like this—my family is just its custodian for a while. As long as it remains in the hands of a Deadhead, I'll be happy."

Just before this issue of *Bass Player* went to print, there was a development. Doug Irwin, the builder of Jerry Garcia's most famous guitars—the Wolf, Tiger and Rosebud—reached out to Scheuner with a never-before-seen photo of the bass from 1975 with a gorgeous koa and abalone triple pickup ring.

Irwin explained that he had built the ring for Phil Lesh, and that he had put it on the bass in 1975. It was subsequently replaced with a brass ring in 1976, but Scheuner and Irwin agreed that Osiris would look best with a duplicate of the koa and abalone ring.

As Irwin still had the same piece of koa and the same bag of shell which he had used to make the original in 1975, a historically accurate duplicate was made and installed. This is a fitting final touch for what we feel is one of history's most beautiful and significant bass guitars. ■



Pass Notes

JON LAWHON BLACK STONE CHERRY

Bass tips and key advice from the rockin' BSC bassist

Photography: Mike Rodway

The Kentucky-based quartet Black Stone Cherry have spent close to two decades reaping the rewards of their successful blend of rock, metal, country, and blues—with a stable line-up that shows no sign of deviating from their chosen path. Bassist Jon Lawhon, joined by frontman Chris Robertson, guitarist Ben Wells, and drummer John Fred Young, is on super-solid form on BSC's new album, *The Human Condition*, recorded in his own facility, Monocle Studios. If you're interested in finding out about the principles that have kept this band sane and loaded with epic bass parts, read on...

Find the right band

"It's essential that you find like-minded people to play music with. The goal is to achieve a level of success that will allow you to travel all over the world and do what you love on a daily basis, right? Imagine that: You spend years of your life rehearsing, writing, playing local venues, and nearly starving at times, all for a chance to secure a future in this industry.

"One day, you sign a deal, record an album, find a label, and before you know it, you find yourself on a real tour in a van. Everything's great, life is good, you're finally, really, doing it. Then you witness the decline of western civilization... you wake up one day, and realize that you can't stand half of your band. You disagree on everything. You find yourself stuck in that van.

"The goal is to achieve a level of success that will allow your band to travel all over the world and do what you love on a daily basis, right?"

"The point is that when you're starting out, spend quality time with your band-mates. Go to movies, discuss politics and religion, get it all out there. Even if you disagree, it doesn't matter. The point is to find out whether or not you can live together and respect each other's

views and space. You have to love each other and accept each other like family—because that's exactly what you will become."

Write cool music

"For the love of God, be original! Record labels have made a habit out of searching for bands that sound far too similar to other 'currently successful' acts. There are a million reasons why that's wrong. Be different. Stick out like a sore thumb. It's okay—actually, it's really refreshing. Sure, let your influences ring out loud, but make sure those influences come from an era long gone and not from two weeks ago. Cover the unexpected, and leave the common and average to the other bands.'

Build your show

"Sounding good live is top tier. Employing the right techs and sound guy are the root of success, and just as important as rehearsing and being able to deliver a performance. As a bass player it's your job to be the foundation, so make sure you've got it together. We all make mistakes, but if you mess up, the whole band will come off the tracks.'



Know the business

“The agencies and people you need when you’re starting out are as follows: Merch, accountant, attorney, booking, management and then either a label or a distribution company. You should put these items in place in that order. Most artists think, ‘We’ve gotta get signed to a label’. Not true at all. While that can be extremely helpful, you can easily self-release your music if you’re proactive enough. A label can bring a lot to the table, but they are by no means your first step. Killer merch designs and the capability to manage online sales is step one. Without that, you can’t earn enough money to survive.

“A certified public accountant (CPA) will help you manage your money and keep your bills paid. The attorney is of utmost importance, because without them, you could literally lose everything. Booking, of course, keeps you on the road supporting your album and earning a living. Without management, you will have no guidance through this difficult industry: They can help you find bigger and better companies to run merch, book tours and grow as a band. I could literally go on forever about this, so I’d suggest finding an experienced advisor to further your knowledge about the way it works. Feel free to find me on Facebook.’

Stay in control

“Never forget who the boss is. You and your band mates call the shots. All the people and companies I mentioned in the previous column work for you. You are the best advocate for your own career. Their job is to assist you. At the end of the day, it’s your name, face, and voice that the people will be paying attention to. Make sure you’re being represented in the way that you want to be. The more hands-on you are with everything—from content creation and songwriting, to which tour you’re going to do and where the marketing money will be spent—will only grow your brand in the ways and avenues you want it to grow. Never become complacent.’

Appreciate your people

“Thank you guys, for taking time to read my ramblings. There’s far more where that came from! I hope everyone is staying safe through these uncertain times, and I look forward to seeing you on the road.’ ■

*Black Stone Cherry’s new album, **The Human Condition**, is out now. Info: www.blackstonecherry.com.*

LUCKY JIM

Jimmy Haslip continues to push forward the frontiers of bass guitar with album reissues, sessions and a playing style that is like no other.

We're so used to thinking of our fingers moving towards the floor when we play an ascending bass part that it comes as something of a shock to see the unique former Yellowjackets bassist Jimmy Haslip in action. Not only does he play a left-handed bass, he strings it upside-down, in other words his low B string is physically lower than his high C. Add to this his phenomenal ability when it comes to fast soloing, and your brain ends up tied in knots.

Fortunately we have the great Grammy-winning bassist right here, 69 years old and full of energy, ready to talk about his unorthodox technique, some of the many albums on which it appears, and his memories of taking bass lessons 46 years ago with a certain J. Pastorius...

Have you done much recording from home in the pandemic, Jimmy?

I have two studios that are a stone's throw away from my home here in Venice Beach. For that reason I've dragged my feet about getting a home studio set up, but in February 2020 it started looking a bit crazy with the virus, so I realized that I needed to get some gear together to allow me to work from home. I've gotten pretty comfortable with it. I don't profess to be a very good engineer, but I can actually sit here and record electric bass, and even some keyboards, so I'm happy.

What is your go-to bass gear these days?

Aside from the Roscoe basses that I've been using for some years, I also have a bunch of old Tobias basses and some newer MTDs. I've

been in touch with [luthier] Mike Tobias for a long, long time and I absolutely love his instruments. I feel connected to them, just as I do with Keith Roscoe's basses. I met a luthier in Japan named Hirotaka Kiuchi who has a boutique company called Inner Wood, and I hooked up with him. I introduced him to Keith Roscoe's company, and he ended up being the rep in Japan for them. We became friends, and he built me three beautiful instruments. They're pretty straightforward: Off the top of my head I would just describe them as souped-up Fender basses with great-quality sounds. You plug one of those into a direct box in the studio for a session and engineers and very comfortable with it.

Tell us about the reissues of your albums *Red Heat* and *Nightfall*.

I was originally signed to a small label named Unitone, and I did the original version of *Red Heat* for them in the early Nineties. I did that record with [pianist] Joe Vannelli, having already worked with him on a variety of projects. At the time, my father wasn't well, and he had always wanted the Yellowjackets to do a Latin-influenced album, which—as I told him—would be difficult because the band was a consortium of four musicians, and I wasn't comfortable pushing a certain genre of music on the band. When he took ill, I thought it would be a good idea to do a project of music that was influenced by my Latin roots, which are not especially deep, because I grew up in Long Island.

You weren't an aficionado of that culture?

The culture that I got from Puerto Rico was really from my parents and my cousins; it

wasn't as steeped in tradition as it would have been if I'd been born and raised in Puerto Rico. I did learn a lot as a young kid, being around the culture and the music, from Tito Puente to Mongo Santamaria and Ray Barretto, and I saw a lot of these bands play in New York, which made a big impact on me when I was growing up and studying music. So I made the decision to focus *Red Heat* on anything I could bring to the party that concerned Latin music and culture. It was my own take on it. It was a wonderful experience to work on that album, and to have my father be the focus of the emotion that I put into it. Unitone did a good job and it achieved some success when it came out. Joe was right there with me: He put 1000 percent into helping me put it together, just as he did with *Nightfall* some years later, which I wrote when my daughter was enduring a health crisis. There was no real support for that album, which is why I decided to reissue it, along with *Red Heat*, on Blue Canoe Records, where I've been A&R-ing for a while.

Do you ever listen back to a recording and feel that you could have done better?

Always, ha ha! Even on the day I finish a session, I think maybe I could have done a better job. As I get older I feel like I'm changing as a bass player on a daily basis.

In a good way?

I hope so! I feel like I'm progressing as a musician and becoming a better one as time goes on. I still put in a lot of time with the instrument, just as I've done in the past. Do you know the theory of becoming good at anything you want to do as long as you put at least 10,000 hours into it? I know I've put at least that many hours into it already, but I'm still not satisfied. I'll be happy to put another 10,000 hours into it, although I don't know if I'll have enough time, because I turned 69 this year. Thanks to the pandemic, I've put in at least 1000 hours this year alone.

“Do you know the theory of becoming good at anything you want as long as you put at least 10,000 hours into it? Thanks to the pandemic, I've put in at least 1000 hours on the bass guitar this year alone...”



With the way you string your basses, do you think that upper-register fills are easier to play for you, because the higher strings are closer to your fingers?

It's very possible. I really haven't analyzed that at all. I look at playing any instrument as a difficult task. To get proficient takes time and energy, as it does to get comfortable with the instrument and to get a sound out of it, and then to start getting into the technical and mechanical aspects of playing it. In my case, I always felt that because I play the bass guitar unconventionally, I was always having to deal with some unconventional hurdle, to play the instrument correctly. And at this point in my life, I know I don't play the instrument correctly, ha ha! I've sort of abandoned some of those kinds of rules and just tried to find my own way of expressing myself on the instrument, for better or for worse. That's led me down some interesting paths and studies.

Tell us about your lessons with Jaco.

That was an explosion of an experience. You know how things just happen, by coincidence or fate or chance—all these things that come

into a lifetime of experience? It so happened that at the time in 1975, I was just settling in to Los Angeles, having moved here from New Orleans. The goal was to get a record deal, and I ran into a drummer that I had met in New York but got to know in New Orleans. He invited me and our guitar player to come to Los Angeles. The drummer was Carmine Appice, who is a force of nature. I've been friends with him ever since. He graciously put us up, and I think he wanted to play with us, but he was committed contractually to his band KGB. He introduced us to his brother Vinny, and we formed a trio. He then introduced us to these guys Cavallo, Ruffalo and Fagnoli, who had a huge management company. At the time they were managing a new artist called Prince, as well as Earth, Wind And Fire, and Little Feat, who I loved – and Weather Report, who I had always been in awe of.

Not a bad artist roster.

Right! They took us on, and we were managed by them. They were very interested in what we were doing and they were seeking a record

deal for us. In the process we ended up in a rehearsal hall that belonged to Frank Zappa. It had two rooms, a small one that we were in because we were just a trio, and a larger one with a stage with Weather Report in it. They were rehearsing at the same time as us, so I was incredibly excited, and I snuck in to watch. To my surprise, I saw this long-haired guy playing bass, and I was thinking 'Who's this?' because I was expecting to see Alphonso Johnson. But I'd never heard anything quite like this new guy, and he blew me away. I waited around, and when they finished I went up to Jaco and introduced myself and asked if he gave lessons. He said 'Well, I'm going to be in town for the next 10 or 12 days, so if you want we can get together and have some lessons'. I said 'Great!' and with that I took probably a half-dozen lessons with him, as well as some regular time just hanging out with him. In the first lesson he said 'I just finished my first solo project, do you want to hear something? It's not out yet but it's coming out soon'. I said 'Sure' and he stuck some headphones on my head, and the first thing I heard was 'Donna Lee'.



Photo: Getty Images

Was he impressed by your playing?

I was astounded that he said I actually had pretty good technique. I took that as a very high compliment, coming from him, and it was very motivating. Now that I've done a lot of teaching, I understand that the job of a good teacher is to motivate the students. Jaco was right to do that, although whether he meant it or not, I don't know! I did feel like I had some things going on in my favor at that point, though.

What were they?

Well, people ask me all the time how I play fast, because I've had that skill from when I first started playing, although I don't know why that happened. I guess learning to play when you're an impatient 13-year-old might be one of the reasons, though. Jaco told me to start out slow and build up speed over a period of time, which was a good lesson for the impatient 25-year-old that I was. I was always trying to learn things at speed, and sometimes that would be frustrating. It was a revelation to me that I could slow all the notes down and play at a slower tempo, before building up again once I was comfortable.

What else did Jaco teach you?

He suggested some ideas after he watched me play for a while, and he also asked me if I had any thoughts about what I wanted to do. At the time I was trying to work on some melodic things that I was having a little trouble with, and he gave me this great tool that I use to this day. He said, 'If you can sing something, you should be able to play it'. He also asked me to listen to more horn players, which was good advice when it comes to soloing, and he told me to study Bach's Inventions and Sinfonias,

which I was unaware of until he told me about it. They were very technically challenging.

You also played with Allan Holdsworth.

That was an incredible experience. Being able to tour and perform with Allan was unmistakably one of the highlights of my career, and being able to get inside his head a little bit and to understand what he was about, was an eye-opening experience. He was a genius, and it's been said many times that he actually changed his instrument. You can count those people on one hand. I'll always revere that experience and never take it for granted. And playing with a gentleman like Gary Husband was incredible too, because he's not only a great drummer, he's also an amazing piano player, which is unique. There's really not too many of those people on the planet.

Tell us about the online masterclasses that you've been doing lately.

When I started doing them, I looked back at some improvisational exercises that I've been working on over the years, because I thought they would make a good lesson. They're just things that I've done off the top of my head without thinking about it—just trying to find personal ways for me to express myself on the instrument. As I analyzed these things, I came to realize that there were a lot of technical aspects to them that I'd never really thought about, harmonically speaking. People would say 'What are you doing there?' and I had to say to myself, 'Yeah... what *am* I doing there?' Ha ha! I've spent a lot of time on really researching what I was doing to try to make sense of it, and it's led me down a bit of a rabbit hole, but fortunately I have a lot of

books here that I work from, as well as my own book that I put out in the early Nineties, *The Melodic Library For Bass*.

What were your intentions when you assembled that book?

It was my attempt to put on paper how I organize scales, and it stemmed from when I was 18 years old and playing in a Top 40 band in New York. This guitar player showed me the way he organized pentatonic scales, and he showed me these patterns, which were basically inversions of a major scale. That was a really cool lesson about harmonic structure—a very basic structure, but an extremely useful one that is used in a lot of different music all the time. So if you study that, you're going to have a vast knowledge of music. He also showed me an interesting way to organize the modal scales, which is another scalar system that deals with the major scales and the seven inversions of those.

Most of us are terrified of modes.

Well, I might suggest looking at *The Melodic Library For Bass* in that case. I tried to make them as simple and clear as possible in that book. I wrote out every scale in the modal system, in all 12 keys, with a numbers system for root, third, fourth, fifth and so on, and also in letters and notation. I felt like that took the pressure off anybody that didn't read music. Reading music is important, and it should be studied in my opinion, but I'm not gonna bust anybody's chops about reading if they don't read. I truly believe that the music is the most important part of anything that we're dealing with here, so if you can play music on a toothpick and a rubber band—then my hat goes off to you. ■



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DUNN DEAL

There is no rock band quite like Mr. Bungle.
There is no composer quite like John Zorn.
Trevor Dunn plays bass for them both...

Words: Joel McIver **Photography:** Keith Price

Mr. Bungle, the California-based five-piece, were formed in 1985, and have always inhabited slightly vague musical territory in their sporadic periods of activity since then. Their singer Mike Patton is better known for his work with Faith No More, who tip a hat to the more eclectic work of Bungle from time to time, but who generally remain much more digestible in their approach. In 2021, however, Mr Bungle are arguably enjoying a higher profile than FNM for the first time, thanks to an astounding album they recently released on Patton's label, Ipecac.

The album, *The Raging Wrath Of The Easter Bunny Demo*, is a modern reworking of the 1986 demo of the same name. Back then it was a cassette of attempts to play thrash metal; the just-released version is an all-grown-up transformation of the old songs into an unexpectedly savage suite of music. To achieve this, the core Bungle members Patton, Trey Spruance (guitar), and Trevor Dunn (bass) invited two veteran thrash metallers on board—Scott Ian, Anthrax guitarist, and Dave Lombardo, formerly of Slayer, and now of Suicidal Tendencies. Recorded at Dave Grohl's Studio 606 in Los Angeles, the record is completely unpredictable, even by the standards of this bizarre band. We asked Dunn to talk us through it from a bass point of view...

Here you are, Trevor, with the metal album of the year, even though you're not a metal band. What's it like playing bass alongside Scott Ian and Dave Lombardo?

Both those guys are relentless, it's great. Me and Mike and Trey were joking about it, like 'These old men are keeping us on our toes!'

There's a lot of distorted bass on there.

I used a really cool pedal called a Gamechanger Audio

"John Zorn definitely likes to push his musicians. He pushes your abilities. It's always fun, though."

Plasma [reviewed in BP in 2019—Ed] for some of that. Patton gave it to me for my birthday, which was our first day of rehearsal. That was just at a couple of points on the album; mostly I used a Line 6 modeller, because I like being able to have different distortions. I like to have only a little bit of distortion so the bottom end can do its thing. I'm super happy with the tones on the album, and I also attribute that to the amp I used. I was going to use an Ampeg SVT, but it was basically too loud for this room we recorded in, so I used a Verellen Meatsmoke amp. I'd never used one before, but I gave it a try, and it was amazing. I also want to give our mixing engineer Jay Ruston a nod, because he's a bass player. We had to mix remotely, with him sending us mixes and us all chiming in from different parts of the country, and as soon as I heard it, I thought the bass sounded killer. Usually the bass is buried in the guitars in metal.

So why did you decide to re-record the old demo songs?

It was initially just a fun idea for me and Trey and Mike. Our first demo from 1986 never left our side, in a way—we only played music from it a couple of times, and of course no-one knew what it was: We could have been playing any weird cover. But we wrote that music with people like Dave and Scott in mind, and we thought, 'Man, it would be fun to revisit this', and it really was super-fun, especially with those guys, who were kicking our asses.

Did you record it before the pandemic?

We played some shows in the first week of February 2020, and we went into the studio right after that, in mid-February. A couple of us got sick right around that time—Dave and

Trey had a really weird flu thing that they'd never had before—so it's very possible that a couple of us had the coronavirus all the way back then.

How did you become a bass player?

My first instrument when I was a kid was the clarinet, but my older brother played guitar, and he started bringing home rock records by bands like Kiss and Blondie and Ted Nugent and Elton John. He would crank them up and play along with them really loudly until the neighbors complained, and I decided I wanted to play bass, although I don't think I really knew the difference between guitar and bass back then. My dad tried to talk me out of it, saying 'Why don't you play guitar? It's more up front', but decades later I now know that I'm definitely a bass player rather than a guitar player. It's in my personality to sit back and groove with the drummer, and I took to it immediately. My first bass was a dark brown Hondo of some kind. I played it on our first demo, but I sold it when I was in college, and bought an Ibanez.

Did you take lessons?

Yes, I had a couple of really great teachers. I remember one of them would show me blues bass-lines and play guitar over the top of them, which was amazing training. They turned me onto the greats like Stanley Clarke and Jaco and Louis Johnson and Bobby Vega. One of them made me a tape of songs with amazing bass-lines, and I didn't even know what they were until I got older. I'd hear a song by Sly Stone, and realize that I knew the song even before I knew who the band was.

What's your bass setup nowadays?

I'm using a 1975 Fender P-Bass that I bought in the Nineties for \$700 or something—it's probably worth more now. That's my go-to bass with this version of our band. I use D'Addario strings in Bungle, and La Bella flats in other bands. I usually let them go dead, but for metal I like the tones a little more crispy. I also have a five-string Alembic that I've had for years and I really love. That's also a great bass for metal, and I was considering using it for this record, but it's really heavy and not so good for travel.



Mr Dunn with canine friend...
probably a 'bass-et' hound.

Are you usually an Ampeg user?

Yes, I ask for an 8x10 cab and an Ampeg Pro 4 SVT when we're touring, but I also like the old tube amps, although they're so frickin' heavy. If the tubes are good in those amps, you almost don't need any pedals, the grit is so good. I use some distortion in this version of Bungle, but not much, because the guitars cover it and I don't want to oversaturate the bass.

What else do you do apart from Mr Bungle?

I play a lot with John Zorn in a bunch of his ensembles here in New York, and I also play upright in a couple of different jazz-leaning bands, although I'm not a traditional jazz bassist.

What's it like playing with Zorn?

He's intense and hard-working; kind of what you would expect from hearing his music. I've been working with him for 20 years, and I've definitely learned a lot from playing with him.

Is he a tough boss?

He definitely likes to push his musicians. He hires people that he trusts, and then he pushes your abilities. If I can get through a recording with him, the next one's going to be even more difficult, like, 'Oh, you can do that? Well, maybe you can do this!' Ha ha! It's always really fun, though. He takes his music very seriously, although some people seem to think that he means it as a joke.

Your band suffers from the same thing, presumably?

Yes, and this new record is not helping that at all! I've read some comments here and there along the lines of 'This isn't the real Bungle' but man, we put a lot of energy into this album. It's kind of what we started out as, when we were 15 or 16 years old—all the metal guys were our heroes. We could have become that, I guess, but then we started listening to bands like Fishbone and everything changed for us... ■

The Raging Wrath Of The Easter Bunny Demo
is out now on **Ipecac Recordings**.

Info: www.mrbungle.com.

WHISKEY TONES

Session and solo bassist **Leanne Bowes** recalls the key moments that took her career to the next level

My dad was an awesome drummer and all-around musician, and he always had instruments lying around the house, so I was always checking things out and tinkering around. When I was about 12, he decided to build his own electronic kit and got into MIDI recording, and he asked me to learn ‘So Lonely’ by the Police on his bass so he could try capturing a live bass and drums take. I was obsessed with the way the bass combined both melody and rhythm, and basically haven’t put it down since.

I learned every CD in the house, and thanks to my mom, we had a killer collection. She was the only mom I knew who listened to Alice In Chains, Nine Inch Nails and Nirvana. My dad and I always used to jam together, so in so many ways he was my introduction into being passionate about music. He passed away too young in 2011, and that was part of what inspired me to quit my day job and make music my career in his honor.

My first bass guitar was my Fender P-Bass in sunburst, probably purchased by my dad around 1999. I was just a high-schooler when I used to play local gigs with it, and I remember at one band practice the saddle was crooked after one too many nights left in the trunk of my car. I quick-fixed it with a little piece of notebook paper from my homework. It’s still there, and I love when I notice it on stage now! I still play that bass occasionally and it’s a time capsule to what feels like another lifetime.

My favorite bass is my 2008 Fender P-Bass in Blizzard Pearl. It was an unexpected gift from my father, and when he gave it to me he said ‘It came with a flight case, for when you’re

touring the world’. At the time it sounded totally ludicrous, so I almost cried the first time I saw that flight case coming around the bend on a luggage belt in Sweden on my first European tour in 2013. I also use a Fender American Professional Series Jazz for those smooth tone gigs, a Stagg J-Bass that gives me a metallic punk tone, and a Fender acoustic Kingman for the occasional unplugged gig.

As for pedals, I keep my board simple, and I usually have my Empress compressor, an overdrive, and a wah pedal that I find pretty versatile for the varying types of gigs I play. Sometimes, though, an artist will recommend an additional pedal based on their preferences, and I love getting my hands on something new to achieve that vision. As for doing at-home session work, I use Ableton Live with an M-Track audio interface.

When I was pretty new to the world of playing bass professionally, my band had the opportunity to record with Linda Perry in her studio. I was beside myself with nerves, because I’d never been in such a huge recording studio and I felt out of my league. I was hitting every note and thought things were going okay, but Linda stopped the session, came right up to me and said, ‘Relax’. She could actually hear through my playing that I was nervous, even though I thought I was playing it perfectly. She offered me a shot of whiskey, and in that moment I learned that

“I want my deep inner connection with the beat to come across, and that leaves no room for nerves”

our nerves prevent us from actually feeling the music and putting ourselves into the beat. I took a deep breath and loosened every part of my body, and she immediately noticed the difference in the track.

We used that next take, and it’s now something that I do every time I track or play live. I want my deep inner connection with the beat to come across, and that leaves no room for nerves.





While I grew up learning from the great classic rock bassists, once I started my career in touring I was in awe of Cone McCaslin of Sum 41. My band at the time, Hunter Valentine, gave me my first taste of professional touring, and we opened for Sum 41 for a tour back in 2013. Cone's relaxed but powerful stage presence totally struck me, and I still steal his moves when I perform today. More important than his presence and talent, Cone is a

down-to-earth and sweet person, despite having been in the limelight since he was a teenager. I admire that a lot. Luckily, our paths have crossed professionally many times since we first met, and we're good friends.

My fingers are crossed that I'll be able to announce some shows and tours again for various artists sooner rather than later, as we're safely able to become less socially distant, but in the meantime I've been doing

session work. You'll hear my bass and vocals on some upcoming tracks for a few different artists, including Derek Day, Jules & The Howl, and Jennifer Lee Snowden. My debut EP under the pseudonym Badways comes out at the end of this year. I've never released my own music before, but in this downtime from my usual gigs as a hired gun, I really found my voice—and I'm excited to share it. ■

Instagram: @leannekbowes

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GEAR Reviews

Welcome to our expert road-tests of state-of-the-art basses, amps and effects.

Behold our world-beating bass gear review section, where we bring you the crop of each month's new, interesting or otherwise relevant bass guitars, bass amplifiers, **bass cabs**, and bass effects. Occasionally we'll review a guitar effect if it's useful for bassists, but generally speaking, this zone is reserved for bass-specific gear.

We take our reviews seriously. *BP* is the last English-language print magazine devoted solely to bass in the world, and we have readers all over the planet, so we're responsible about our conclusions. If a product is worth your time, we'll say so; if it's flawed, we'll make that clear. We're not answerable to advertisers in any way, and our tests are independent of the views of musicians, manufacturers, and distributors.

When you read about a product here, you're getting a fair, balanced review from a highly experienced gear tester. Value for money is at the top of our agenda in these cash-strapped times, but on the other hand, we believe in paying for quality. Let us know what you think of our conclusions. Did we get it right?

Joel McIver, Editor



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Reviewed this month...

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EPIPHONE

JACK CASADY

\$799 www.gibson.com

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LAIRAT

STEGA DELUXE

\$3990 lairat.com

54

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FORTÉ D AMP, NXT112

AND NXT210 CABS

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EPIPHONE

Jack Casady

GIBSON
www.gibson.com

From the Tunas—sorry, tuners—to the bridge, Jack Casady’s venerable bass design endures into the 2020s, says Joel McIver

Launched in 1997 and designed personally by sometime Jefferson Airplane and Hot Tuna bassist Jack Casady, this semi-hollow-bodied bass guitar has enjoyed more or less consistent acclaim since then for its tones, feel, and build. As the lack of a solid body and its resolutely old-school look has led some of our community to assume that the Epiphone JC lacks versatility, our mission today is to take a deep dive into the performance of the 2021 version, and see what it can actually do. Into the psychedelic rabbit-hole we go...

Build Quality

Without wishing to sound too much like a dewy-eyed nostalgist, this bass feels like an artifact from another era when you slide it out of its



\$799

gigbag. The shallow, wide body occupies more of a footprint against your abdomen than usual, assuming you're accustomed to regular Fender-sized body types—one benefit of this being that you feel the tones as much as hear them. The acoustic performance of the EJC is there, courtesy of those F-holes, but the volume is low, so don't expect anyone to hear you outside the room. Made of maple with a single-ply cream binding, the body oozes vintage cool, thanks to that white scratchplate and the technicolor blue finish.

The neck feels more modern, with the expected 34" scale, 20 frets, and mahogany solidity making your fretting hand instantly at home. There's a chunky headstock, again signalling its heritage with cloverleaf machine heads, but no tendency towards neck-dive

for a change. The bridge is functional, and the two gold volume and tone control knobs are familiar, while that quirky three-position rotary selector—chicken-head design and all—begs you to plug in.

Sounds And Playability

Presumably aware that people might write this off as a traditional bass that only makes traditional sounds, the designers at Epiphone have equipped the JC with a humbucker that we're told is dialled up for maximum clarity. Roll the tone on, and you'll soon agree that they've done their job admirably, with an audible clank. Sure, it's no Rickenbacker, but there's enough top-end zing and sparkle here for most practical purposes.



A fun bass, but not a trivial one. It's too well-designed and costly not to take seriously.

However, the rotary control—or VariTone impedance shifting circuit, to give it its full name—is the place to go if you're looking for a wide tone range. This allows you to select a range of impedances from circa 50 to around 500 ohms, which may sound irrelevant to anyone who doesn't work in a physics lab, but means in real-world terms that you can add significant amounts of crispy punch to your sound.

Max it out if you're soloing, or having trouble cutting through those pesky guitars; stick to a less glassy setting if you're after a less present tone; stick with the default lowest setting if you're in need of some trad thud. It's simple but useful; without it, the Casady bass would definitely lack some user-friendly versatility.

All this aside, this bass is a playable and solid instrument. The neck is perfectly navigable, even if asking it to deliver big tones in the upper register is tricky. The fingerboard feels slender in contrast to that big ol' body, but that doesn't stop the instrument doing its job. In design and production terms, the JC performs just as efficiently as it did in '97.

Conclusion

This is a fun, bass but not trivial; it's too well-designed—and costly—not to take seriously. If you're interested in a traditional feel, beefed up with a concession towards modern bass tones, your time investigating this instrument will be well spent. Try with our full recommendation. [▶](#)

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | \$799**Made In** | Korea**Body** | Layered maple with single-ply cream binding, Sparkling Burgundy and Faded Pelham Blue finishes available**Neck** | Mahogany, 34" scale**Fingerboard** | Indian Laurel, 20 frets**Pickups** | JCB-1 low-impedance humbucker**Controls** | Volume, tone, three-way rotary selector**Hardware** | Die-cast tuners, adjustable bridge and tailpiece**Case/gig bag included** | No**Left-hand option available** | No**WHAT WE THINK****Plus** | Tone-shaping is unusual but excellent**Minus** | Hollow body and feel are not for everyone**Overall** | Far from a one-trick pony, the JC serves many purposes**BP RATING**

BUILD QUALITY



SOUND QUALITY



VALUE







LAIRAT

Stega Deluxe

Player-friendly design plus precision-engineered components makes for a winner, says Stuart Clayton

LAIRAT
lairat.com

\$3990

The Stega bass, built by luthier Paul Lairat, was originally released back in 2004, and continues to be one of the company's most popular models. Pairing a futuristic aesthetic with a versatile onboard preamp, the Stega Deluxe bass promises to be both eye and ear-grabbing, a combination that certainly has our interest piqued. Lairat's growing artist list seems to bear this out, with the likes of Dave Marotta, Pepe Hernandez, Etienne Mbappé, Marc Guillermon, and fusion phenomenon Gabriel Severn all now using the company's instruments.

Build Quality

The unusual body of the Stega has five different types of lumber: The edge splints are walnut and ebony, while the main body is mahogany with a wenge veneer. Various different kinds of lumber are available from Lairat, but our review model is topped with an eye-catching curly walnut. The neck also comprises multiple types of lumber, formed from six strips of maple, one of wenge, two mahogany, and two walnut. This is topped with an ebony fingerboard, which is the perfect aesthetic accompaniment to the curly walnut top lumber. The large oval Delano Xtender soapbox pickups fit the bill nicely, as does the black hardware.

The design and construction of the instrument is obviously more complex than that of a conventional bass guitar, but the execution here

is faultless: The build quality and finishing are superb across the board, indicative of a high-end boutique instrument. Fretwork is excellent, as is the overall setup of the instrument. A look inside the electronics cavity reveals a well-shielded compartment and neat wiring, with a separate flip-up compartment for the 9V battery.

Unusually, the plate covering the electronics cavity appeared to be made from maple, rather than the mahogany of the body. It's a very minor gripe, but I felt this looked out of place, and would have preferred to see a matching cover. But who looks at the back of an instrument?

You'll likely have noticed that in terms of the control set, the Stega Deluxe is somewhat unorthodox. In the absence of a lower portion of the body, the preamp and controls are instead mounted on the top bout of the instrument, with two additional toggle switches tucked away in the upper cavity. The first two of the three controls are stacked: Master volume/mid and treble/bass boost and cut, respectively. The third control is the pickup blend. The two toggle switches are an active/passive switch and a split pickup switch.

Sounds And Playability

The onboard Glockenklang preamp caters well to the needs of the modern bassist: Soloing the neck pickup yields a powerful, well-rounded tone that had plenty of thump, while the bridge pickup

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | \$3990

Made In | France

Body | Walnut and ebony splints, mahogany and wenge body, curly walnut top

Neck | Maple, wenge, mahogany, walnut

Frets | 24

Pickups | Delano Xtender

Electronics | Glockenklang

Controls | Stacked master volume/mids, stacked treble/bass, pickup blend, active/passive switch, split pickup switch

Hardware | PL by Gotoh, ABM bridge

Weight | 9 lbs

Left-hand option available | Yes

Case/gig bag included | Gigbag

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Great design, great tones, plays beautifully

Minus | Some minor headstock dive when seated

Minus | An excellent, forward-looking instrument

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★★

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★★

VALUE

★★★★★★★★★★★☆☆





Despite its unusual ergonomics, this is an incredibly playable instrument, smooth and easy to get around, as well as being inspiring to work with

offers up some serious bite. Soloing either pickup results in tones that are fairly extreme in terms of the aforementioned thump and bite, and the best results—as with most active instruments—come from finding that sweet spot in between that works in whatever context you’re playing in. Fine-tuning with the treble/bass controls adds further flexibility to the palette, of course.

In passive mode, the Stega remains incredibly effective: One of the benefits of the preamp is that if the EQ controls are centered in active mode, there is no noticeable drop in volume when switching between active and passive. In terms of playability, the Stega responds well to whatever I throw at it.

Despite its unusual ergonomics, this is an incredibly playable instrument, smooth and easy to get around, as well as being inspiring to work with. The placement of the controls is no issue with regard to actually playing the instrument, although it’s worth noting that the absence of a considerable amount of body mass does affect the balance to a degree—I found that the instrument exhibits some headstock dive when played seated. Fortunately, despite the absence of a certain amount of lumber, sustain is excellent.

Conclusion

With so many of today’s bass guitars built on just a few basic tried-and-tested templates, it’s refreshing to see a builder looking for new ways to approach the design. All of Paul Lairat’s instruments part ways with the conventional to one degree or another, and I for one am glad to see it. The appearance of the Stega certainly divided opinion among those who saw it, but feelings were overwhelmingly positive and certainly no-one could forget it.

Retailing at such a high price, the Stega Deluxe occupies a challenging sector of the market, particularly during these uncertain times. That said, it’s an instrument that would work well for those looking for something a bit special: It’s versatile, comfortable and offers a wide tonal palette. It’s perhaps not one for the low-slung rock brigade, but who knows? If you’re looking for something a little different, we’d certainly recommend a test drive. ■



BERGANTINO

Forté D amp, NXT112 and 210 cabinets

BERGANTINO
<https://bergantino.com>

Freddy Villano
plugs into the
high-spec, high-
powered new Forté
D amp from the
mighty Bergantino

When the topic of feel or playability comes up, it's probably fair to say that many bassists think in terms of their respective instrument, not their amp. Players don't usually emphasize feel or playability as a chief characteristic of an amp rig, perhaps because those qualities are harder to quantify in a component that isn't in direct contact with your hands.

To most players, tone is just what comes out of the cabinet—the sound. But when you have a bass in your hands, you want it to *feel* good. It's not fun when you're fighting for every note: You start thinking too much about playing rather than performing or recording. The incredibly dynamic Bergantino Audio Systems Forté D



\$999,
\$899,
\$1099

bass amp and NXT, or Neo X-Treme Technology, speaker cabinets epitomize what a truly intuitive, playable rig can, and should, *feel* like.

I first heard about Bergantino from John Brown's Body bassist Dan Africano. He was extolling the virtues of their amps and speaker cabs long before the opportunity to review the Forté D and NXT cabs presented itself. Having seen him perform several times, most notably at the annual Ithaca Reggae Fest in Ithaca, NY, I always noted that his tone was thick, without being muddy; crisp, while retaining bottom end; and warm, with abundant clarity and articulation—and he's obviously a great player too, so that mustn't go unacknowledged.

The man behind these tonal characteristics is Jim Bergantino, a master craftsman in hi-tech electrical engineering and high-end

hi-fi. Bergantino also designed custom bass cabinets for other leading brands before deciding to launch his own company in 2001. This background, combined with the philosophy of being an engineering-driven company, rather than being a sales-driven venture, contributes to Bergantino's mystique as an audiophile's nirvana.

Though the Forté D is advertised as an incredibly flexible and lightweight bass amplifier, I was equally surprised at how portable the NXT cabs were, even before getting them out of the shipping cartons. This is a worthy consideration, given the fact that most musicians are likely hauling their own gear these days. The Forté D uses the same preamp and powerful 800W RMS power amp section

The NXT speakers delivered a full-range, harmonically rich tone, and even enhanced the lows and highs of other amplifiers I demoed with at home



employed in Bergantino's ground-breaking B|Amp; both feature their BFT drive circuit, a component that Product Development Specialist Lee Presgrave was integral in co-developing.

As opposed to the digital aspect of the B|Amp faceplate, the Forté D has a traditional amplifier look, even though the circuitry is digital, for those players who want simple options and controls. I first connected it to the NXT112 with tweeter cab only, using a passive custom P-Bass. Right out of the gate, without even adjusting any knobs on the four-band EQ, I was impressed with the clarity. Good or bad, I could hear, as if for the first time ever, every bit of articulation in my bass-lines.

If I wanted a little more meat, a simple adjustment of Bass and Lo-Mid added what I was looking for, and was intuitively responsive. Same with the top end: In the interest of exploring the Forté D's capabilities, I dialled in a bit more Hi-Mid and Treble than I normally use, and again, I was impressed with the amp's responsiveness. The Bright switch allowed me to tailor the tone even more, enabling additional presence to my sound.

The built-in Bergantino proprietary Parallel Dynamic Circuitry made the dynamic intentions in whatever I was playing more pronounced, so I was able to get after any inconsistency because I was hearing things I hadn't heard before on any other rig. I couldn't help digging into some classic James Jamerson Motown grooves, since the ghost notes that are inherent in those lines seem to come alive with clarity and definition that made the rhythmic elements seem punchier and the melodic elements sound smoother. I'm usually not a huge fan of built-in dynamic processors, because oftentimes I find that it squashes the headroom

of an amp. However, the Parallel Dynamic Circuitry reacted quite differently, allowing my tone to have a depth and breadth I hadn't experienced with other built-in compressors.

I was fortunate enough to be able to take this rig for a test run on a gig performing two sets of Led Zeppelin covers. Since the Forté D features dual Speakon outputs, allowing you to hook up multiple cabinets without daisy-chaining, I brought the NXT210 with tweeter cab as well. The cabs are made from Baltic Birch and lightweight plywood, reducing their overall weight while still sounding harmonically rich, especially throughout the midrange of the speaker. I was impressed at how well the cabs cut through the rest of the band, despite contending with two guitars, keyboards, and a 24" bass drum.

The Drive knob on the Forté D provided enough grit to cut through without sacrificing any low end, clarity or definition. It's also worth noting the rig's consistency from string to string. The D- and G-strings were as loud as my E- and A-strings, and I was running the Forté D flat. How many times have you had to EQ your bass amp to get the high strings to be as consistent, volume-wise, as the low strings? Both cabs feature Bergantino's reference tweeter and constant directivity horn via custom-designed, phase-coherent crossovers. The NXT speakers delivered a full-range, harmonically rich tone, and even enhanced the lows and highs of other amplifiers I demoed with at home.

Whether you're in the market for a head, or cabs, or both, you'd be hard-pressed to find anything better than the Bergantino Forté D and NXT speaker cabs. This is a complete bass system ably designed to meet, and often exceed, all of your sonic needs and expectations. ■

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | Forté D \$999, NXT112 \$899,
NXT210 \$1099

Made In | USA

Power | 800W RMS output @ 2ohms, 700W
RMS @ 4 ohms, 350W RMS @ 8 ohms

Speaker | NXT112 12" speaker;
NXT210 2 x 10" speakers

Features

Forté D | Four-band EQ (Bass: +/- 10dB at 65Hz; Lo-Mid: +/- 10dB at 250Hz; Hi-Mid: +/- 10dB at 1kHz; Treble: +/- 10dB at 3.5kHz), Bright switch, Adjustable BFT Drive circuit, on-board Parallel Dynamic Circuit, Aux input and headphone out, effects loop, dual Speakon outputs, studio-quality DI with selectable pre- or post-EQ and line out, tuner out

NXT210 cab (NXT112 cab) | Neodymium magnet woofers, High Intelligibility Reference Series Tweeter, ported, lightweight Italian poplar with Baltic birch baffle, Black Bronco Tolex, 8 ohms, 500W (400W) RMS, phase-coherent crossover with tweeter control, 40hz-12Khz frequency response, sensitivity 98db @ 2.83v / 1-meter

Dimensions | Forté D 10.5" (W) x 8.4" (D) x 3.75" (H)

NXT210 cab 22.75" (H) x 18.5" (W) x 12.5" (D)

NXT112 cab | 17.75" (H) x 18.5" (W) x 14" (D)

Weight | Forté D 6 lbs

NXT112 29 lbs

NXT210 33 lbs

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Lightweight, portable, incredibly responsive tone, fully integrated system.

Minus | The pricetag could be a deterrent for some.

Overall | This is a complete bass system ably designed to meet, and often exceed, all of your sonic needs and expectations.

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY



SOUND QUALITY



VALUE



The background is a solid dark blue. It is decorated with white and light blue snowflakes of various sizes scattered around the edges. In the top right corner, there is a cluster of white guitar necks. In the bottom left corner, there is a cluster of white guitar necks. In the bottom right corner, there is a cluster of white guitar necks.

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I SPY...

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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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BEGINNER

64

STEVE LAWSON

Kickstart your journey to the top of the bass world here

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 Donnelly, 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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INTERMEDIATE

70

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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ADVANCED

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STUART CLAYTON

Take the bass world by storm with advanced study

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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I SPY...

MINOR ARPEGGIOS



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

Hey there, bass players! In our previous column, we spied major arpeggios in their natural habitat. We learned how to use them in a 'I-IV-V-I' chord progression, discovered that Paul McCartney frequently put them to good use, and realized how effortlessly they provide the groove to Memphis soul classics. The next logical step is, of course, the minor arpeggio. We'll highlight the difference between major and minor, adapt the exercises to reflect minor tonality, and discover a few aural examples of arpeggios in action.

As we begin playing songs, we start to realize that it's quite rare to have a chord progression with all major chords—even when we're dealing with a three-chord folk, rock, or country song. A simple progression like C-Am-F includes, obviously, an A minor chord. Some players tend to think that knowing the root is enough to get by: After all, how else can you strategically avoid wrong notes? If you're a beginner, then sure. Get comfortable with root notes. But trust me, there's a much bigger world out there, and I encourage you to train your ear, train your hands, and take responsibility for chord tones.

To understand the difference between a major chord and minor chord, go back to the

elementary descriptions of 'happy-sounding' or 'sad-sounding'. Major arpeggios tend to sound more pleasant and positive; minor arpeggios tend to sound a little bluer and more melancholy. It may take time to hear this distinction, especially because bass players tend to be particularly good at honing in on root notes, but practice makes perfect.

In addition to hearing the difference, it's important to know that the third of the chord will signify major or minor, while the root and fifth will stay the same. Therefore, in an A Major chord, the notes would be A-C#-E; in an A minor chord, the notes would be A-C-E. Major triads have a major third, or the distance of two whole steps from the root. Minor triads sport a minor third, or the distance of one and a half steps from the root. Now that you understand the distinction, you can easily switch between the major or minor arpeggio. All you have to do is shift the third scale degree down a half step.

Exercises 1 and 2 will feature different (and equally useful) fingering patterns for minor arpeggios. We'll be working in the key of A minor, so no sharps or flats will get in our way. Follow the chord progression 'i-iv-v-i,' or Am-Dm-Em-Am. Note that when we use Roman numerals to define the progression—a common shorthand in classical and

jazz—we use lower-case letters to denote a minor chord, and upper-case for major.

In **Exercise 1**, we'll begin with our first finger on A, the fifth fret of our E string. We'll play the minor third on the same string, using our pinky to play C on the 8th fret. Then play the fifth (E) with your third finger on the 7th fret of the A string. Move the same pattern over one string to play a minor arpeggio on D, up two frets to play the minor arpeggio on E, and then return to A to complete the phrase.

In **Exercise 2**, we'll play the same arpeggios with a different fingering pattern. This time, start in the same place—the A on the 5th fret of your E string—but use your middle finger. Play the minor third with your index finger on the third fret of your A string. Then, reach up and grab the fifth with your pinky on the 7th fret of the A string. Use the same fingering pattern for the D minor and E minor triads. While this version of the triad requires a bit of a stretch, it will certainly come in handy when you start moving through other chord progressions, creating funk bass lines, and learning Led Zeppelin riffs.

For **Exercise 3**, practise moving arpeggios up and down the neck in whole steps. While we're not following a chord progression, the goal is to practise arpeggios while shifting vertically. Begin with the first fingering

EXERCISE ONE

The exercise consists of two systems of musical notation. Each system has a staff with notes and a corresponding fretboard diagram below it. The first system shows the first four measures, and the second system shows the next four measures. Fingering numbers (1-4) are written above the notes, and fret numbers are written on the fretboard lines.

EXERCISE TWO

Exercise Two is a 4-measure bass line in 4/4 time. The notation includes a bass staff with notes and a guitar staff with fret numbers. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above the notes.

Measure 1: Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2, C3. Guitar staff has frets 5, 3, 7, 7. Fingering: 2, 1, 4, 4.

Measure 2: Bass staff has notes D3, E3, F3, G3. Guitar staff has frets 7, 7, 3, 5. Fingering: 4, 4, 1, 2.

Measure 3: Bass staff has notes A2, G2, F2, E2. Guitar staff has frets 5, 3, 7, 7. Fingering: 2, 1, 4, 4.

Measure 4: Bass staff has notes D2, C2, B1, A1. Guitar staff has frets 7, 7, 3, 5. Fingering: 4, 4, 1, 2.

EXERCISE THREE

Exercise Three is a 4-measure bass line in 4/4 time. The notation includes a bass staff with notes and a guitar staff with fret numbers. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above the notes. The exercise is marked 'sim.' for similar.

Measure 1: Bass staff has notes G2, A2, B2, C3. Guitar staff has frets 2, 5, 4, 4. Fingering: 1, 4, 3, 3.

Measure 2: Bass staff has notes D3, E3, F3, G3. Guitar staff has frets 6, 6, 7, 4. Fingering: 3, 3, 4, 1.

Measure 3: Bass staff has notes A2, G2, F2, E2. Guitar staff has frets 6, 9, 8, 8. Fingering: 1, 1, 4, 3.

Measure 4: Bass staff has notes D2, C2, B1, A1. Guitar staff has frets 10, 10, 11, 8. Fingering: 3, 3, 4, 1.

pattern, starting with your index finger on the 2nd fret of your A string. When you reach the octave, shift up a whole step with your third finger and play a descending arpeggio. When you arrive at the next root, shift your first finger up a whole step and play an ascending arpeggio. Use this method to arrive at the high A (the 14th fret of the G string) and then descend the neck. Once you're comfortable playing this exercise, give it a try with the fingering pattern from **Exercise 2**.

Now it's time to do some spying. If you're just dipping your toes into the world of minor arpeggios, 'Badge' by Cream is the perfect

song to listen to. Jack Bruce creates the signature opening riff by sliding into the A on the 5th fret of the E string, playing a minor arpeggio, and then sliding into D on the A string's 5th fret. It's played at a reasonable tempo, and frankly, it's just an awesome bass-line to know. I recommend using the fingering pattern from **Exercise 2**; it will make the slide into the root notes feel a bit more natural.

Next up, the Clash's 'The Guns Of Brixton' from *London Calling*. This song uses a B minor arpeggio right out of the gate, playing it first ascending and then descending. Paul Simonon cleverly marries punk rock attitude with

reggae rhythms—a genre that often features arpeggiated chords and syncopated rhythms in the bass.

Lastly, Creedence Clearwater Revival's version of 'I Put A Spell On You'. Minor arpeggios contribute a dark and moody bass-line to this spooky classic. As in most minor blues, not all chords in the progression are minor—some may be major or dominant—so listen carefully to discern the difference. The good news is that you're now equipped to play both, so you can navigate the chord progression even when it mixes and matches arpeggios. See you next month! ■



The great Steve Lawson brings us a new approach to studying bass at beginner level. The journey begins...

HONE YOUR SKILLS

CHORD INVERSIONS EXPLORED

Welcome! This month we're going to look at ways to use the notes in the chord other than the root as our bass note.

The term for putting a note other than the root in the bass of a chord is a chord inversion. Ready?

Let's recap how we construct chords in a given key. Starting on any note in the key as the root of our chord, we play the next two alternate notes above it in the scale to give us the third and fifth. For example, in C Major, starting on C, we get C, E, and G to make a C Major chord. Normally, we'd start by playing the C in the bass, because the root is our first port of call for constructing a bass-line—but there are quite a few occasions when the music presents an opportunity to use one of the other notes instead of the root. This can be to make a bass-line smoother, or just because a particular chord shape sounds better to us in that situation. Remember, any rules like this are only an invitation to explore in a certain area. What we decide we like is a matter for our own taste!

Let's try an example chord progression and introduce some chord inversions to change the bass-line. We'll begin with a line with just the roots in the bass.

Exercise 1

Here, we're just playing the roots on the I, IV and V chords – C, F and G, all Major chords. The second bar of C is where we can first add an inversion—so instead of C, let's play E in the bass. See below.

Exercise 2

Notice that the chord symbol is written as C/E—'C over E' is how we say this. To the left of the line is the chord, and to the right of it is the non-root note that we're using in the bass. That E is the third of our C Major chord, and this shape—or any chord with its third in the bass—is called a first inversion.

Let's take a moment to talk about that naming convention. As we mention above, we have three notes in a standard major or minor chord: The root, third, and fifth. You can see them in notation in Exercise 2.

Exercise 3

The reason for using standard notation here is that notes on a page are really useful for

helps us to read music on the bass as a series of intervals within a key, rather than having to translate every single note into a fret position on the fingerboard by name. We can see and recognize patterns of intervallic relationships that help us to understand what's going on—so Exercise 3 is a root position C Major chord.

To turn any chord into a first inversion, we invert it, as the name suggests. That is, we take the lowest note, and move it up an octave, leaving the next lowest note—the third—in the bass, as in Exercise 3.

Exercise 4

So now our notes, lowest to highest, go E, G, C, or 3rd, 5th, root. The 'root' of the chord is

Starting on any note in the key as the root note for our chord, the next two alternate notes above it in the scale give us the third and fifth

seeing interval relationships, far more so than TAB. Note that the TAB under the block chords here is tricky to play—it's just there to show where the notes would be on the fingerboard, so don't get too stuck trying to play the chord shapes.

We can see here that all the notes are written in the spaces, with none written on the lines. This is because we're going up alternate notes in the scale, 1, 3, and 5. The even numbers would be on the lines.

There's a rather beautiful symmetry to how music is written in this way, and it

now on top. This is still very much a C Major chord—we've just reordered the notes to give us a different sound.

Back to our chord progression. That C/E in bar two gives us a smoother movement between the C Major and the F Major. As it's still a C Major chord even though we've got the third in the bass, it doesn't disrupt the melody or any other harmonic elements. Whether or not any chordal instruments need to also play an E as the lowest note of their chord voicing is a matter for you to experiment with, but so long as you're the

EXERCISE ONE

Once you've got chord inversions under your fingers on a four-string bass, why not try applying them to a five-string?





Beginners Lesson

EXERCISE TWO

C C/E F G

Exercise Two is a four-measure piece in 4/4 time. The first measure is C major, the second is C/E, the third is F major, and the fourth is G major. The melody is written in the bass clef. The fretboard diagram shows the following fingerings: Measure 1: T=3, A=3, B=3; Measure 2: 2, 2, 2; Measure 3: 3, 3, 3; Measure 4: 5, 5, 5.

EXERCISE THREE

C

Exercise Three is a two-measure piece in 4/8 time. The first measure is C major, and the second measure is C major. The melody is written in the bass clef. The fretboard diagram shows the following fingerings: Measure 1: T=5, A=7, B=8; Measure 2: 8, 7, 5.

EXERCISE FOUR

C

Exercise Four is a two-measure piece in 4/8 time. The first measure is C major, and the second measure is C major. The melody is written in the bass clef. The fretboard diagram shows the following fingerings: Measure 1: T=5, A=5, B=7; Measure 2: 7, 5, 5.

EXERCISE FIVE

C C/E F G/B

Exercise Five is a four-measure piece in 4/4 time. The first measure is C major, the second is C/E, the third is F major, and the fourth is G/B. The melody is written in the bass clef. The fretboard diagram shows the following fingerings: Measure 1: T=3, A=3, B=3; Measure 2: 2, 2, 2; Measure 3: 3, 3, 3; Measure 4: 2, 2, 2.

EXERCISE SIX

C C/E F G/B

Exercise Six is a four-measure piece in 4/4 time. The first measure is C major, the second is C/E, the third is F major, and the fourth is G/B. The melody is written in the bass clef. The fretboard diagram shows the following fingerings: Measure 1: T=3, A=3, B=3; Measure 2: 2, 2, 2; Measure 3: 3, 3, 3, 2, 5, 3; Measure 4: 2, 2, 2.



Try to feel the chord tones that you use; an acoustic bass will help you to maintain focus

Photo: Getty Images

lowest note in the band, if you play an E in the bass, the chord becomes C/E—or C over E.

Inversions can present us with a good opportunity to use some of the scalar runs that we've been exploring over the last few months in a bass-line context. This time we're not only going to have C/E in bar two, but we're also going to play the G in bar four as a second inversion. The notes in a G chord are G, B, and D, so our first inversion would have B in the bass, as in Exercise 4, over to the left.

Exercise 5

The B leads very nicely back into the C, but from F down to B there is a nice opportunity for a scalar walk down. See Exercise 5.

Exercise 6

If the eighth note rundown feels a bit quick, remember that there's no tempo marking on this exercise. It's just that, an exercise—so you should start at a really slow tempo to give yourself time to work out exactly what's

Inversions can present us with a good opportunity to use some of the scalar runs that we've been exploring in a bass-line context

going on, before gradually increasing the speed.

This is one of those occasions when it'll really help to get someone else to play the chords for you to hear how the bass-line works against it. If you're still in some kind of lockdown or social distancing situation as you read this, it's another chance to experiment with collaborative recording. Find a drum loop of the correct tempo, and get a friend who plays guitar or keyboards to record the chords so you can put a bass part to it.

Now, let's look at another very common chord progression that uses the first inversion to great effect. We'll change the key this time and play it in E Major, so the notes we have available to us in that key are

E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, and D#. This is where our earlier point about reading intervals rather than notes will come in very handy. If we can work out how the scale is mapped out on the fingerboard, we can follow this line down in scale steps without having to give any further thought to which notes are the sharps and which ones are the natural notes.

Exercise 7

By using the first inversion of the B Major chord and the A Major chord, we're able to make a very smoothly flowing bass-line. Every interval in the whole line just follows the scale, so once we've worked out where the notes are in an E Major scale, we can just follow the contour of the line on the page to

★ Beginners Lesson

EXERCISE SEVEN

E B/D# C#m A A/C# B/D#

EXERCISE EIGHT

C C/E C/G

EXERCISE NINE

C F/C

When using a loop pedal to create music, pedal notes can allow you to loop a bass-line that centers around just one note and work out the chord voicings that change the chord over the top

get the notes and count through the rhythm slowly.

So far we've only used the first inversion, putting the third of the chord in the bass—so let's finish up today with a look at one possible use for a second inversion. We'll start by looking at what happens to the chord. For the second inversion, we invert it twice—that is, we move the lowest note, the root, up the octave, and then we do the same with the third, leaving the fifth as the lowest note. See Exercise 7, above.

Exercise 8

This is often used when the bass plays a 'pedal' note underneath changing chords—so if the progression alternates

between C Major and F Major, we can stay on the note C for both chords, as in Exercise 8.

Exercise 9

Again, you're going to want to hear how this works by getting someone to play or record the chords for you to play along to. A neat variation on this idea is used on '(Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher And Higher' by Jackie Wilson, where the pedal is maintained through all the chords in the song. It can be hugely effective, and if you're experimenting with using a loop pedal to create music, it allows you to loop a bass-line that centers around just one note, and then work out chord voicings that change the chord over the top.

The world of inversions opens up a whole new way of thinking about bass-line construction for us, so take your time, see if you can spot lines in songs that use it, and work this month on being able to see the shapes for each inversion on the bass neck as well as playing them as arpeggios. See you soon! ■

If you only do one thing this month...

Work out what the notes are in the key of A Major, and play them in sequence from A to A and then from F# to F#.



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PENTATONICS

UNPACK PENTATONICS



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

Hello again! It's fair to say that you don't need a degree in astrophysics to be able to play a pentatonic scale. The structures are easy to visualize, sonically accessible and also fall very conveniently under the fingertips. However, the one downside of pentatonic scales is also the very reason why we use them—their dissonant tonality is minimal due to the omittance of semitones. In other words, it's very hard to play anything that sounds bad, as all the notes are good ones.

Still, some tension is a good thing, as it evokes resolution. The question arises: If we want to use pentatonic scales for all of the aforementioned reasons, while also wishing to sound a little more profound in our melodic interpretation, is there a way that we can get the best of both worlds? You bet your bottom dollar there is.

See **Exercise 1**, for example. While still remaining within the same key center, this exercise uses the same major pentatonic shape in two completely different fingerboard positions.

If you perform the structure in root position over any major chord, you'll access the tonic, major 2nd, major 3rd, perfect 5th, and major 6th intervals. The first of this month's 'game changer' perspectives occurs when you execute exactly the same structure on the dominant pitch.

In doing this, you're able to access the perfect 5th, major 6th, major 2nd (now a 9th) and major 3rd (now a 10th) intervals again—the added presence of the major 7th now creates a tasteful degree of dissonance.

EXERCISE ONE

♩ = 85

C G/C

T A B 3 5 2 5 2 5 10 12 9 12 9 12

Being aware of dissonance, you can continually evolve your sound and personality on your instrument, without needing to spend hours upon hours on new scales.

The one downside of pentatonic scales is also the very reason why we use them—their dissonant tonality is minimal due to the omittance of semitones



Jimi Hendrix and Noel Redding

EXERCISE TWO

♩ = 100

C G/C C G/C

Measures 1-4 of Exercise Two. The top staff shows a bass line in 4/4 time with eighth notes. The bottom staff shows a guitar fretboard with fingerings for the A and B strings. Chords C and G/C are indicated above the staff.

Exercise 2 demonstrates how this simple concept can be used to maximum effect. Over the first two beats of each measure, an unassuming ostinato groove has been produced to underpin a C major chord. However, in the subsequent beats, an array of upper extensions have been introduced, simply by employing the aforementioned technique. When moving into position to deliver the melodic flourishes, place your middle finger on fret 10 of the A string.

EXERCISE THREE

♩ = 100

C D/C

Measures 1-4 of Exercise Three. The top staff shows a bass line in 4/4 time with eighth notes and trills. The bottom staff shows a guitar fretboard with fingerings for the A and B strings. Chords C and D/C are indicated above the staff.

Those of you that have studied major harmonization will be aware that it's reminiscent of the use of relative modes and their application—but here's how this methodology can differ. 'Modally' speaking, the scale formed upon the second diatonic step of major harmonization is Dorian, which accompanies a minor 7th chord, but if we play a major pentatonic scale here, it allows you to access the upper extensions of the tonic chord. **Exercise 3** excavates this theory via a two-bar ostinato groove.



Intermediate Lesson

EXERCISE FOUR

♩ = 85

C

Fretboard diagram for C major scale:

String	6	5	4	3	2	1	6
Notes	C	D	E	F	G	A	B

Cm

Fretboard diagram for C minor scale:

String	6	5	4	3	2	1	6
Notes	C	Bb	Ab	Gb	Fb	Eb	D

Cm(b5)

Fretboard diagram for C minor pentatonic scale:

String	6	5	4	3	2	1	6
Notes	C	Bb	Ab	Gb	Fb	Eb	D

Obviously, the more we know about pentatonic modes, the more opportunities arise where we can investigate their melodic timbre. If we concentrate purely on the major scale, we can identify seven primary chords associated with that structure. For each of these chords, there is a scale. This scale is more commonly referred to as a 'mode'. Seven scales all consisting of seven notes is a lot of processing for anyone, but what if I told you that with just three pentatonic structures you can efficiently cover all of the necessary information? **Exercise 4** identifies the three pentatonic scales that you'll need: Major, minor, and the minor pentatonic (♭5).

Damian Erskine: a mode master

The more we know about pentatonic modes, the more opportunities arise where we can investigate their melodic timbre



Jeff Berlin, educator
extraordinaire

From every chord
produced during
the harmonization
process, there is an
associated mode

EXERCISE FIVE

♩ = 85

C Dm Em F

G Am Bm(b5) C

From every chord produced during the harmonization process, there is an associated mode. This exercise demonstrates how we can substitute each one of these modes with a coinciding pentatonic. Here, we classify these pentatonic scales. The order of their delivery is determined by, and coincides with, the corresponding chord, mirroring triad categorization. Commit these shapes and sequences to memory, paying particular attention to the intervals that exist between each of the positions, as these will be referred to again, later in our studies.



Intermediate Lesson

Photo: Mary Moffatt



The great Yolanda Charles:
Recently awarded an MBE

Relative harmony is a cool device for developing your melodic voice. All you need to do is identify the distance that exists between the chord you're on and the chord you wish to employ

EXERCISE SIX

♩ = 100

G⁷

First system of musical notation for Exercise Six, featuring a G⁷ chord. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a trill marked above the final note. The guitar part is shown on a six-string staff with fret numbers (5, 10) and a trill mark.

C⁷

Second system of musical notation for Exercise Six, featuring a C⁷ chord. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a trill marked above the final note. The guitar part is shown on a six-string staff with fret numbers (5, 7, 8, 9, 10) and a trill mark.

G⁷

Third system of musical notation for Exercise Six, featuring a G⁷ chord. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a trill marked above the final note. The guitar part is shown on a six-string staff with fret numbers (5, 7, 8, 9, 10) and a trill mark.

Relative harmony is a cool device for developing your melodic voice. All you need to be able to do is identify the distance that exists between the chord you're on and the chord you wish to employ. The equation is simple: See a dominant chord, go up four frets (a major 3rd), and play a minor (♭5) pentatonic. The result is a melodious texture, utilized in every bar prior to harmonic movement in **Example 6**.

EXERCISE SEVEN

♩ = 125

G⁷[illegible]

C7

G⁷

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is written in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of four measures. The first measure contains a quarter note F#4, an eighth note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The second measure contains an eighth note C5, an eighth note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F#4. The third measure contains a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note C4, and a quarter note B3. The fourth measure contains a quarter note A3, a quarter note G3, a quarter note F#3, and a quarter note E3. The guitar tablature is written on a six-string staff below the melody. The first measure has fret numbers 5, 5, 3, 2, 5. The second measure has fret numbers 2, 5, 2, 3, 2, 5, 2, 5. The third measure has fret numbers 2, 5, 2, 5. The fourth measure has fret numbers 5, 5, 3, 5, 2, 6. A 'T' (thumb) is indicated above the first fret of the low E string in the first measure, and a 'B' (bar) is indicated below the first fret of the low E string in the first measure.

D⁷

C7

G⁷

D7

The musical score is written in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of four measures, each containing a double bar line and repeat dots. The guitar tablature is written on a six-line staff below the melody. The first measure of the tablature shows a trill on the 5th fret of the A string, indicated by a 'T' above the 'A' and a 'B' below it. The notes are: 5, 3, 2, 5, 5, 3, 2, 5, 2, 5, 5, 3, 5, 2, 6, 5, 3, 4, 5.

As you transcend this exercise, you'll discover some stylish melodic textures that have been created by the aforementioned theory. In time, I hope you'll be able to adopt this approach into your own playing. Have fun, and I'll see you next month!

If you only practise one thing this month...

The effectiveness of scales is all about perspective. If you play pentatonic scales in their root position, they sound functional, but less than electrifying. If you play them based on a different interval from within the same key center, you can find sonic gold. Whenever you see a dominant chord, move up a major 3rd from the root note, and deliver a minor pentatonic with a ♭5—you'll find the resulting melodic timbre to be a lot more musically inspiring!

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The effectiveness of scales is all about perspective. If you play pentatonic scales in their root position, they sound functional, but less than electrifying. If you play them based on a different interval from within the same key center, you can find sonic gold. Whenever you see a dominant chord, move up a major 3rd from the root note, and deliver a minor pentatonic with a ♭5—you'll find the resulting melodic timbre to be a lot more musically inspiring!



Groove master
Darryl Anders



THUMB METHODS

COMBINE MULTIPLE THUMB STROKES



Ace bass educator Stuart Clayton guides us to the peak of the bass skills pyramid. Achieve your goals here!

Over the past few columns, we've been looking at the double thumbing technique and getting ourselves tangled up with some fairly complex slap lines. In the last instalment, we focused our attention on playing triplets using a down-up-pop sequence. This enabled us to play some blisteringly fast lines, as well as being a neat way to outline chords.

In this month's journey into the technique, we'll introduce an additional picking element—the second finger. This will mean that we now have four ways of playing the string with the picking hand: Thumb down

and upstrokes, and pops with the first and second fingers. It seems likely that we'll be able to get into all kinds of trouble with all of these elements at our disposal.

True mastery of slap bass will mean that you will be able to use the technique to play lines that might otherwise be performed using the fingerstyle technique. Adding a second popped note into the mix will bring us a step closer to that goal. In the opening exercises of this column, down and upstrokes with the thumb will be combined with two popped notes to allow us to play sequences of four notes: Down-up-pop 1-pop 2. The benefits of being able to execute this

sequence at speed will probably be obvious, but it's important that you don't rush through these initial exercises. It's crucial that you master this technique at slow tempos—or free time, preferably—and then increase the tempo as you become more comfortable.

Before you dive into the exercises, it's worth pointing out that a common problem that bass players experience when double popping is getting their fingers caught under the strings. This is especially problematic when you actually want the pops to produce pitched notes, and is usually due to there being too much or too little space between the body and strings at the end of the neck. As I've mentioned in previous instalments of this column, installing a ramp can alleviate this issue. Lowering your action slightly can help too, but you'll need to set it so that you're not compromising your usual playing style.

True mastery of slap bass will mean you will be able to play lines that might otherwise be performed using the fingerstyle technique

EXERCISE ONE

♩ = 100

The exercise consists of two systems of musical notation in 4/4 time. Each system has a top staff with a slur over four eighth notes and a bottom staff with a sequence of notes and slurs. The notation includes pick-up strokes (upward arrows) and fingerings (1, 2, 5, 7). The first system has a tempo marking of 100 beats per minute.

In this exercise, we'll be using notes at the fifth and seventh frets to practise the concept. The notes themselves are not important here: Be sure that all of your attention is focused on your picking hand. Aim for consistency in tone, volume, and attack with each stroke. The true masters of this technique employ it in such way that their popped notes are indistinguishable from their slapped notes.

EXERCISE TWO

♩ = 75

Exercise Two consists of two systems of musical notation in bass clef, 4/4 time. Each system contains a staff with sixteenth-note patterns and a corresponding line of fingerings. The first system's fingering line includes the sequence: T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2. The second system's fingering line includes: T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2. The notation includes various sixteenth-note runs, including ascending and descending scales, and patterns with repeated notes.

This exercise is similar to the previous one, but requires you to play sixteenth notes using the same technique. Although this exercise has a slower tempo, you should practise it initially at a tempo that is comfortable for you. Don't be tempted to rush this exercise, and remember to aim for smooth, even, well-articulated notes.

EXERCISE THREE

♩ = 75

Exercise Three consists of two systems of musical notation in bass clef, 4/4 time. Each system contains a staff with two-octave C major scale patterns and a corresponding line of fingerings. The first system's fingering line includes the sequence: T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2. The second system's fingering line includes: T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T ↑ P1 P2 T. The notation includes ascending and descending two-octave C major scales, with fingerings indicated for each note.

In this exercise the technique is applied to a two-octave C major scale. This is a musical way of practising the technique. Be sure to practise all 12 major scales in this way—doing so will mean that you will be improving your technique while working on musically useful material.

★ Advanced Lesson

EXERCISE FOUR

♩ = 80

Exercise Four is a bass line exercise in 4/4 time, tempo 80. It consists of two systems, each with two measures. The first system uses the notes G2, B1, D2, and F2. The second system uses the notes G2, B1, D2, and F2. The exercise focuses on string-skipping and double popping techniques.

The next hurdle is to conquer string-crossing, also known as string-skipping. This exercise will help you to focus on these elements. The line follows a minor key chord progression, and for each chord you will play the root, tenth (third), octave, and fifth, always returning to the root note at the beginning of each beat. Be sure to try this technique over different chords and progressions.

EXERCISE FIVE

♩ = 110

Exercise Five is a bass line exercise in 4/4 time, tempo 110. It consists of two systems, each with two measures. The first system uses the notes G2, B1, D2, and F2. The second system uses the notes G2, B1, D2, and F2. The exercise focuses on double thumbing and double popping techniques.

This exercise is a funk groove in D, and makes for a good introduction to double thumbing and double popping on different strings. The line itself is fairly basic harmonically, and consists of common funk and disco note choices, for example, the chromatic octave pattern in the second bar.

EXERCISE SIX

♩ = 100

Exercise Six is a bass line exercise in 4/4 time, tempo 100. It consists of two systems, each with two measures. The first system's fretboard diagram shows fingerings: T (thumb), P1 (index), P2 (middle), and T (thumb) for the first measure, and P1 (index), P2 (middle), T (thumb), and T (thumb) for the second measure. The fret numbers are 7, 7, 5, 5, 3, 3, 7, 7, 5, 5, 7, 7. The second system's fretboard diagram shows fingerings: T (thumb), P1 (index), P2 (middle), and T (thumb) for the first measure, and P1 (index), P2 (middle), T (thumb), and T (thumb) for the second measure. The fret numbers are 8, 8, 7, 7, 12, 12, 10, 10, 8, 8, 7, 7.

In this exercise, the double thumbing and popping techniques are used to play octave patterns. If you've successfully completed all of the exercises so far, this one shouldn't prove too much of a problem.

EXERCISE SEVEN

♩ = 100

Exercise Seven is a bass line exercise in 4/4 time, tempo 100. It consists of two systems, each with two measures. The first system's fretboard diagram shows fingerings: T (thumb), P1 (index), P2 (middle), and T (thumb) for the first measure, and P1 (index), P2 (middle), T (thumb), and T (thumb) for the second measure. The fret numbers are 5, 5, 9, 9, 10, 10, 12, 12, 10, 10, 8, 8. The second system's fretboard diagram shows fingerings: T (thumb), P1 (index), P2 (middle), and T (thumb) for the first measure, and P1 (index), P2 (middle), T (thumb), and T (thumb) for the second measure. The fret numbers are 5, 5, 9, 9, 10, 10, 12, 12, 10, 10, 8, 8.

This exercise is reminiscent of Jaco Pastorius' part on the classic Weather Report track 'River People'. This is a good workout for double thumbing and double popping, and is an excellent way to play octave-based lines. Note the use of a quarter-note rest on the last beats of the first and third bars: These allow the line to breathe.



Advanced Lesson

EXERCISE EIGHT

♩ = 100

Exercise Eight is a 4/4 piece in B-flat major, featuring a 16th-note groove. The notation includes a bass staff with a treble clef and a bass clef, and a guitar staff with a treble clef. The bass line is written in a 16th-note groove, with ghost notes (marked with 'x') used to add a percussive element. The guitar staff shows fingerings for the bass line, with numbers 1-5 and 'x' for ghost notes. The notation includes a key signature of two flats (B-flat major) and a time signature of 4/4. The tempo is marked as 100 beats per minute (♩ = 100). The exercise is divided into two systems, each with two staves. The first system shows the first 16 measures, and the second system shows the next 16 measures. The notation includes a key signature of two flats (B-flat major) and a time signature of 4/4. The tempo is marked as 100 beats per minute (♩ = 100). The exercise is divided into two systems, each with two staves. The first system shows the first 16 measures, and the second system shows the next 16 measures. The notation includes a key signature of two flats (B-flat major) and a time signature of 4/4. The tempo is marked as 100 beats per minute (♩ = 100).

This line was originally written as a fingerstyle groove, and features a lot of ghost notes. These are used to add a percussive element to the groove. Bassists such as Jaco Pastorius and Rocco Prestia are two excellent examples of fingerstyle players who make good use of ghost notes.

EXERCISE NINE

♩ = 100 C7

Exercise Nine is a 4/4 piece in C major, featuring a 16th-note groove. The notation includes a bass staff with a treble clef and a bass clef, and a guitar staff with a treble clef. The bass line is written in a 16th-note groove, with double thumbing technique (marked with 'x') used to add a percussive element. The guitar staff shows fingerings for the bass line, with numbers 1-5 and 'x' for ghost notes. The notation includes a key signature of one flat (C major) and a time signature of 4/4. The tempo is marked as 100 beats per minute (♩ = 100). The exercise is divided into two systems, each with two staves. The first system shows the first 16 measures, and the second system shows the next 16 measures. The notation includes a key signature of one flat (C major) and a time signature of 4/4. The tempo is marked as 100 beats per minute (♩ = 100). The exercise is divided into two systems, each with two staves. The first system shows the first 16 measures, and the second system shows the next 16 measures. The notation includes a key signature of one flat (C major) and a time signature of 4/4. The tempo is marked as 100 beats per minute (♩ = 100).

This exercise is a fingerstyle line that has been adapted to be played with the double thumbing technique. It is a sixteenth-note groove in the style of bassists such as Rocco and Jaco, and works well over dominant chords. Although, for the sake of space, this exercise is only written for the first two dominant chords (C7 and F7, following the cycle of fourths), you should work your way through all 12.

EXERCISE NINE [CONTINUED]

F⁷

The first system consists of two measures. The first measure has a bass clef staff with notes F2, A2, C3, and F3. The second measure has a bass clef staff with notes F2, A2, C3, and F3. The tablature for the first measure is: T 10 10, A 8 8, B X X X 8. The tablature for the second measure is: T 10 10, A 8 8, B X X X 8. The second system also consists of two measures. The first measure has a bass clef staff with notes F2, A2, C3, and F3. The second measure has a bass clef staff with notes F2, A2, C3, and F3. The tablature for the first measure is: T 10 10, A 8 8, B X X X 8. The tablature for the second measure is: T 10 10, A 8 8, B X X X 8.

The line follows a pattern: The first and third bars feature root notes and octaves, followed by a line that ascends from the major third up to the fifth. The second bar has roots and octaves again, with a fill beginning on the sixth and moving chromatically upwards to the root. In the fourth bar the fill begins on the sixth degree of the next chord. This harmonic idea helps you to modulate.

EXERCISE TEN

♩ = 100

The first system consists of two measures. The first measure has a bass clef staff with notes F#2, A#2, C#3, and F#3. The second measure has a bass clef staff with notes F#2, A#2, C#3, and F#3. The tablature for the first measure is: T 7 5, A 7 0, B 4 X. The tablature for the second measure is: T 7 5, A 7 0, B 4 X. The second system also consists of two measures. The first measure has a bass clef staff with notes F#2, A#2, C#3, and F#3. The second measure has a bass clef staff with notes F#2, A#2, C#3, and F#3. The tablature for the first measure is: T 7 5, A 7 0, B 4 X. The tablature for the second measure is: T 7 5, A 7 0, B 4 X.

This final line is another fingerstyle groove that has been adapted into a complex, double-thumbing riff. The figure on the third beat of the first three bars is difficult to execute cleanly because of the double popping, so practise it slowly. Note the use of a popped note on the last sixteenth note of each bar—this is the easiest fingering choice, and ensures that you can start the next bar with a thumb downstroke.

You might need to lie down after all of that! As I explained earlier in this month's Advanced column, achieving mastery of these thumb techniques will essentially allow you

to perform almost any kind of bass-line you like, using the slap technique. It's not always appropriate to do so, of course, so it's very important to use these techniques with taste

and restraint. Next month we'll be looking at ways in which we can involve the fretting hand in these more complex lines. Stay healthy, and I'll see you then! ■

Hey everyone! In my last two columns I looked at the workings inside a typical solid-state bass amplifier. Let's now look at valve amps: What are they, and how do they differ from solid-state units?

First of all, we tend to think of valve amplifiers as rather old technology, because the valves themselves—otherwise known as 'tubes', 'vacuum tubes', and 'thermionic valves'—were invented as far back as the first decade of the 20th century. Valve amplifiers are still in production, of course, although in smaller numbers for us bassists compared to our guitar-playing colleagues. Let's look at why we still love this so-called 'old' tech.

All right then. Why should we care about valves?

Well, before tiny integrated circuits such as transistors existed, the majestic vacuum tube—with that recognizable glow—supplied all of our amplification needs for many years. I recall reading my dad's electronics manuals when I was a teen, learning all about thermionic emission. This method of amplification takes place with the help of a vacuum, and requires heat and high voltages to get those electrons flowing. The way that the valves and these other components perform this amplification results in a sound that is pleasing to the ear, especially where distortion is concerned. When you play through a valve amp and speaker, the way that the gear reacts to the transients and dynamics in your playing is what we refer to as the 'feel' of an amplifier.

Do different valves have different sounds, then?

Yes, although the differences can be very subtle, especially when you're swapping them in and out of the same amplifier. You'll definitely notice more of a difference when you upgrade worn or poor-quality valves to premium 'noise and drive tested' replacements, though. On which note, preamplifier

The Last Note

INSIDE YOUR AMP, PART 3

Dan Veall closes this issue with a deeper dive into valve versus solid-state amps.



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



valves can last many years with no noticeable change to their operation. Power amplifier valves can wear out sooner as they work harder. If your sound becomes less clear, the volume drops or extraneous noise can be heard through the speakers, it could be time to get those valves checked out.

Are valve amps so big because of the size of the valves?

Yes. Valve amps also require large power supplies and transformers, which are often chunky, too. This translates to lugging something around that can weigh up to 65 pounds. My Ampeg SVT II is a good example. Note that due to the nature of their technology, solid-state amps can pack more output into smaller boxes.

Conversely, are solid-state amplifiers always light?

Well, not always. Newer Class-D amps which use switch-mode power supplies are generally no heavier than a few pounds, but there is a lot of love for heavy,

non-valve amps out there. These units are sometimes nicknamed 'lead sleds', due to their weight—this is possibly a retro reference to modified American cars of the Fifties. These amplifiers are often rackmountable and contain chunky power supplies.

Doesn't a heavier weight mean a bigger sound, though?

Interestingly, it has been claimed that the sound of 'lead sleds' and valve amps carry more weight tonally. There are a number of reasons why this can appear to be so, but there are too many variables to make this theory watertight. I'd be interested to hear your thoughts on the matter, though.

Aren't valve amps more likely to break? Those valves are made of glass, after all.

Glass is obviously more delicate, but although it's not advisable to do this, I've often kept my uncased valve amps in a van for months on end without suffering any broken valves.

What else do I need to know?

Never run a valve amplifier without a load attached, such as a speaker. Solid-state amps will happily run without this, which makes them convenient when you're using them only to record or with in-ear monitoring.

So what does the future hold for valve amps?

Many amp manufacturers have stopped making all-valve models, due to less demand and high production costs. Still, there are many great bargains to be had on the second-hand market. Consider what you need from your amp—do the magical tone properties of valves really outweigh those exhausting load-outs with a heavyweight amplifier?

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. ■

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