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What's the bass of *your* dreams? Tim Commerford has the answer...

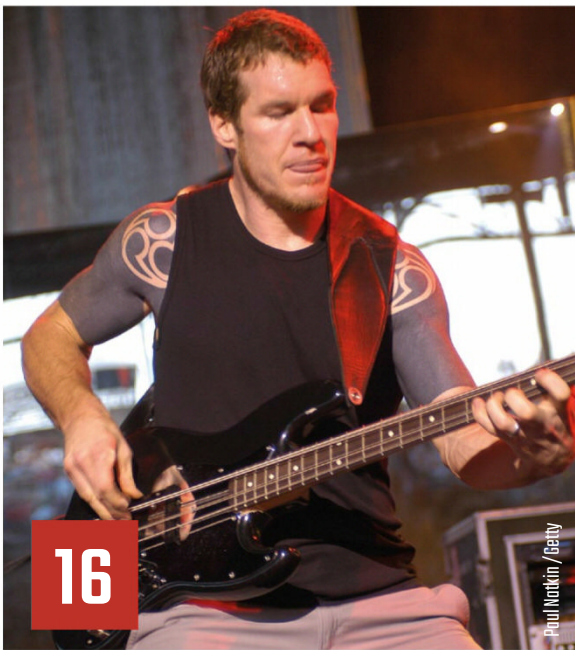
What does a bass player who has served time in Rage Against The Machine, Audioslave, Wakrat, Future User, and Prophets Of Rage need from a signature bass guitar? Not simply power and tones, no. In one of two exclusives for *Bass Player* this month, we get the first look at Tim Commerford's new, strictly limited-edition Ernie Ball Music Man StingRay, and we put it through its paces, examining a couple of innovations along the way that will definitely be of interest to you. This is no ordinary bass, believe us.

We also present you with the first review of Fender's new Player Plus Precision, announced just before we went to press. Now, we're as wary as you are about 'new' versions of old basses, and we're keenly aware that Fender have been adding variants of their classic bass designs to their roster with increasing frequency over the years, so we were deliberately strict with our test. See our verdict on page 48.

As always, your friendly, value-packed *BP* is overflowing with bass goodness, so you'll also read our chats with a wide range of bassists from the indie, avant-garde and classic rock worlds. We lay hands on a bunch of great new bass gear, from the costly to the affordable, and we bring you advice from our world-class stable of bass teachers.

Personally, I'll be working on my note duration (Ryan Madora, page 62), getting funky (Steve Lawson, page 64), trying to grasp the modes of melodic minor (Phil Mann, page 70), and getting my sixteenth down (Rich Brown, page 76). There's always more bass to learn!

Joel McIver, Editor



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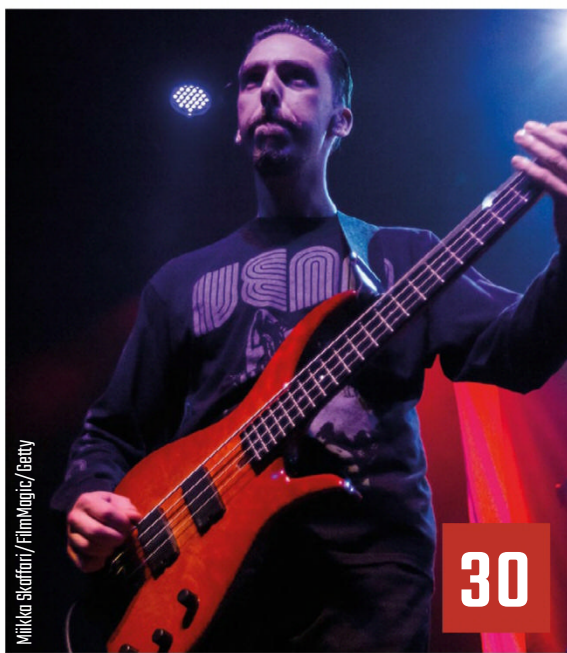
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Mikiko Skaffari/FilmMagic/Getty

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Dwight Visions



Mikiko Skaffari/FilmMagic/Getty

bassplayer

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THE Lowdown

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

ALL JAZZED UP

Fender launches new Player Plus Precision and Jazz basses

Fender has announced the expansion of its Player Series of bass guitars, in a bid to cater towards and nurture the next generation of players—the Player Plus Series. A new active Precision and two active Jazz models take inspiration from the familiar shapes, but with improved playability and comfort.

Of the latest made-in-Mexico lineup, EVP Fender Products Justin Norvell commented, “We designed the new Player Plus series to match the unique characteristics of today’s players and creators. We’ve delivered a line of performance instruments that exemplify Fender’s ethos: Honoring our past while looking to the future.”

The new Precision, pictured with the acclaimed bassist Blu DeTiger at right, aims to deliver the punch and growl that defines Fender’s four-string tones. A three-band active EQ features a switchable active/passive operation for increased tone-sculpting flexibility, and works alongside all-new Player Plus Noiseless pickups. Other specs include a four-saddle HiMass bridge, a 12”-radius fingerboard with rolled edges, and—once again—a modern-C neck profile, included for silky fretboard slides. The Player Plus P-Bass is available for \$1,049.

As for the Jazz and five-string Jazz V, both feature a 12”-radius fingerboard, modern C-shape neck, and HiMass bridge. The pickups are at the mercy of a nifty switch that aims to wring out as much tone from the circuit as possible, with an active/passive toggle switch in partnership with a three-band active EQ for a hands-on tone-tweaking experience. The new Jazz basses are available in a variety of finishes, starting at \$1,099. ■







Dug In

King's X frontman announces solo album.

The great Doug—or dUg if you prefer—Pinnick has revealed a new solo album, *Joy Bomb*, alongside fresh, ZZ Top-inspired material from his Grinder Blues project. Pinnick, the bassist and vocalist of hard rockers King's X, says: “*Joy Bomb* is a collection of tunes I’ve been writing for the last two years. The pandemic has made me go deeper into myself, and how to deal with everything and everyone in a new way. These songs are all about truth the way I see it, and I’m thankful that at 71 I can still make music that hopefully matters.”



Love Lines

A great bass-line in 83 words.

Sly & The Family Stone, ‘Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)’ (1970)

With Bootsy Collins his only real contender in terms of The Funk, Larry Graham delivered line after devastating line with Sly & The Family Stone. This ludicrously butt-shaking song kicks off with a simple slap and pop line which drills into your skull and refuses to let go. After a few minutes of this, you’ll be dying to play it yourself—and it’s simple enough that you’ll probably nail it, too. But will you have as much funk in your soul as Larry?

ASSUME NOTHING

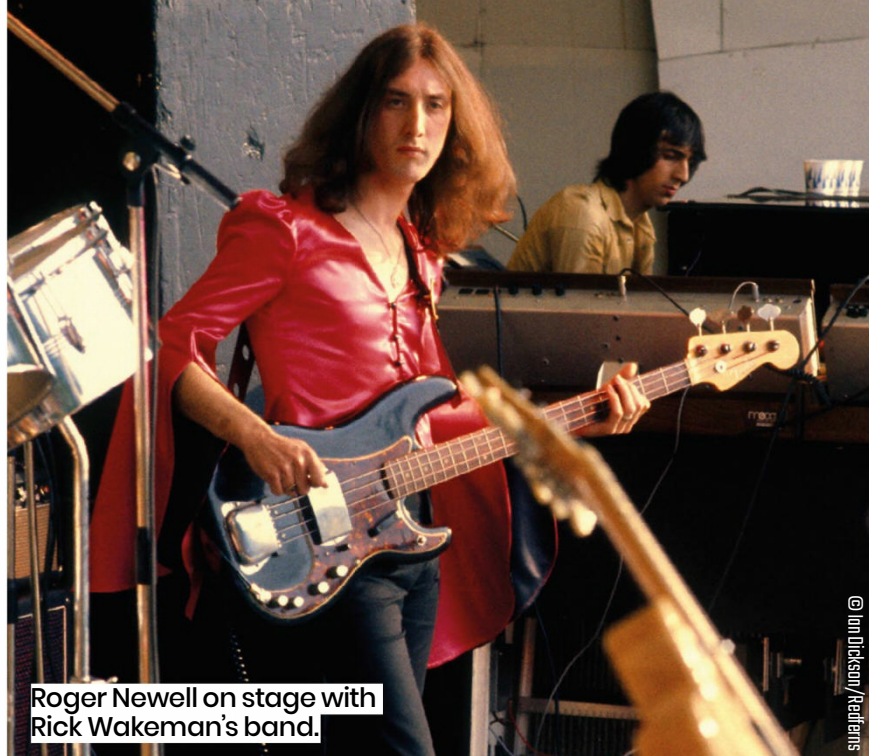
Chloe Peacock challenges received bass wisdom...



Hi all! This month's story about unhelpful assumptions

comes from a bassist called Reed, who once applied to teach bass at a well-known music college. Reed has a teaching qualification, and teaching experience in colleges of similar prestige, as well as years of playing experience in different genres, so he felt as if he had the chance of an interview. However, he was told that because the students were predominantly into rock, he was ‘not suitable’. This was a shock to him, especially as his resume stated that he had plenty of experience as a rock bassist. He tells us that while his default response is not to consider racism as the underlying cause, as a person of color he feels that he can’t discount unconscious racial bias. Sometimes, he tells BP, it can feel that as a black musician you are put forward for R&B, hip-hop, and jazz gigs, but turned away from rock, indie, and metal bands. This is a tricky subject to navigate. No-one wants to risk being labelled as ‘difficult’, especially as self-employed careers depend on creating positive relationships. In terms of coping techniques, he says that he tries to gain as much feedback as possible from employers and uses it to shape goals for the future.

Got an assumption to share? Insta: @assume_bassplayermag



Roger Newell on stage with Rick Wakeman's band.

PASSING NOTES

We say goodbye to three departed bass colleagues.

Roger Newell, former bass player for Rick Wakeman, Marty Wilde and the Wildcats among others, died on September 10. He was best known for performing on Wakeman’s 1974 prog opus, *Journey To The Center Of The Earth*, as well as its follow-ups, *The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur* and *The Knights Of The Round Table* and *No Earthly Connection*, and associated tours.

In order to perform the famously complex works of *King Arthur...* live, Newell collaborated with Wal on the first triple-neck bass, which he used live with Wakeman’s English Rock Ensemble on tours. The original bass was donated to New York’s Hard Rock Cafe, and copies were eventually made for Chris Squire to play with Yes.

In his later career, Newell became the Deputy Editor of the UK’s *Bassist* magazine. He also wrote about bass for *Guitarist*, and was a long-time colleague at Future Publishing, where he kept us all entertained with stories from the world of progressive rock. We will all miss him.

Status Quo’s original bassist **Alan Lancaster** passed away, aged 72, on September 26. He had been a member of the quartet from their formation in 1967 until 1985, and again in 2013–14 for a short-lived but popular reunion. A member of Quo’s most critically and

commercially successful line-up, alongside guitarists Francis Rossi and Rick Parfitt and drummer John Coghlan, he signed off his first sojourn with the group by being the first bassist to step on stage at Live Aid in June 1985.



Alan Lancaster, pictured in 1976.

We also raise a glass to **Bruce Keir**, the co-founder and Technical Director of Blackstar. After graduating college, Keir took a position at Marshall and played an integral role in the company’s technological advancements in the Eighties and Nineties. It was during his time at Marshall that Keir met Ian Robinson, Paul Hayhoe, and Richard Frost, with whom he co-founded Blackstar in 2007. Keir designed all of their original products—including the Artisan, Series One and HT Pedals—and was also behind the digital algorithms that became the company’s acclaimed ID: Series.



Each month, we celebrate a classic, bass-loaded album. Has it stood the test of time?

In the Eighties, 'heavy metal titans' Metallica were a musical phenomenon, but since 1996 they have released a series of acceptably interesting albums rather than classics. At least two of these have sucked so badly that our knees give way and we sink weeping to the ground whenever we think of them. One of them is *St. Anger*, released in 2003, with its terrible drum sound and schoolboy lyrics.

Still, the bass playing on *St. Anger* is pretty decent. While singer James Hetfield worked out his demons in the lyrics, drummer Lars Ulrich replaced his snare with a garbage-can lid, and renowned shredder Kirk Hammett was essentially banned from doing anything creative, producer Bob Rock picked up the bass and recorded some tasteful bass parts. Why him? Because bassist Jason Newsted had left the band two years before, in a rage that Hetfield wouldn't let him play in a side project.

Now, as readers of the metallic persuasion will know, it was Bob 'Mötley Crüe' Rock who



Mr Rock: saintly, not angered

© Colin McConnell/Toronto Star via Getty Images

first gave Metallica their shot at glory, giving their self-titled fifth album a glossy, radio-friendly sound that radio programmers lapped up. His subsequent work with Metallica on their *Load* (1996) and *Reload* ('97) albums was rather less impactful, but when the man is on form he is evidently a studio brain like no other. The coffee must have been fresh in the studio on that day in 2003, because his bass parts on the much-disliked *St. Anger* are probably its finest feature.

**Even when
Metallica aren't
firing on all
cylinders, the
low end will still
save them...**

The songs to look at for our purposes are 'Frantic' and the title track, the album's least terrible compositions. On 'St. Anger', an otherwise depressing experience, Rock delivers a staccato, less-is-more line in an almost reggae style that leaves plenty of space for the rest of the instrumentation. Delivered these days by our chum Robert Trujillo with plenty of feel and finesse, these lines remind us that even when Metallica aren't firing on all cylinders, the low end will still save them... or that's how we like to think of it, anyway. ■



THIS MONTH

Tim Lefebvre

The fusion, rock, and R&B bassist Tim Lefebvre is a master of both the electric and acoustic bass. He has worked constantly with a variety of high-level artists, lending his skills to projects by the likes of Sting, the Sleepy Jackson, Jamie Cullum, Elvis Costello, and more. One of the higher-profile projects he has been involved with is David Bowie's final album *Blackstar*, and he is

also known for working on a number of soundtracks for big and small screens alike. He counts *30 Rock*, *Analyze That*, *The Departed*, and *Ocean's Twelve* among his credits.

Lefebvre, originally of Foxboro, Massachusetts, has around 150 recordings under his belt, and also spent five years and three albums with the blues-rockers Tedeschi Trucks Band. His improvisational side is worked to the max on the free jazz band

Whose Hat Is This?, and he continues to explore musical and bass boundaries with a recent single by New Age Doom and the sadly-departed Upsetter himself, Lee 'Scratch' Perry.

Lefebvre took the time to chat with us from his Los Angeles base about some key records in his storied career, how he came to play with the Thin White Duke, and the time when he unwisely agreed to join a session that was never going to work. ■



MUST-HAVE ALBUM

DAVID BOWIE

Blackstar (2016)



"The way this came about was that the musical director Maria Schneider said to David Bowie, 'Check out Donny McCaslin's band', and gave him a CD, so he came to see us play at the 55 Bar in New York.

"With a track like 'Lazarus' there was already a demo bass-line to follow, and I took it to a few different places. 'Tis A Pity She Was A Whore' also had David's bass-line on the demo, but 'Blackstar' was more freewheeling, so I had licence to do more of what I wanted to do within the confines of the song.

"It's three sections. The first I approached like Tony Levin's playing on Peter Gabriel's 'Don't Give Up', with big slidey lines and sustain. The middle I approached like a Serge Gainsbourg or R&B line, because that's what it reminded me of.

"I was trying to channel Herbie Flowers on 'Space Oddity' and just go with it where we have the chord changes. Mark Guiliana was playing something super-simple on drums with just kick and snare, and I had a lot of fun in all the space to fill.

"For the outro, I was playing eighth notes off-kilter, kind of Sly Stone, Pino Palladino—I was ready for them to say they wanted to re-track it, but they kept it, and the whole thing was awesome."



WORTHY CONTENDER FANGTOOTH

Movie Club (2021)

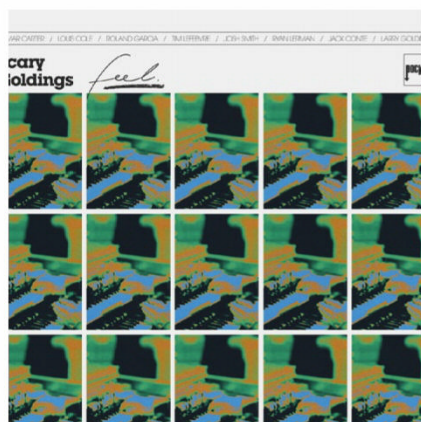


“Vince Cueno, the guitarist and founder member, just said to me, ‘Do whatever you want’, and I was trying to follow—he was nice enough to make charts for me, too. Then he’d specify, on his guitar, something that I could then freewheel with, so on ‘Badlands’ I follow the guitar line quite a bit.

“The way Jessamyn Violet, the co-founder, plays the drums, is really raw and, in a good way, kinda loosey-goosey. It’s not restricted to a grid, and it’s really fun to go around the beat and play punky, like I’m in a nightclub and not giving a shit. It really works great. They have a cinematic, punk vibe that you just tune into and I played in drop D, stuck on some fuzz pedals and just went for it.

“Vinny was careful to sketch out what he needed and what he didn’t like, so I’d always have eight or 16 bars to just go crazy under the guitar solo, or in a psychedelic section.

“I did a lot of recording at home over the pandemic. My go-to is a Noble DI, and I go through my Neve 3104 mic pre for things that need some sauce. I also made a bunch of bass plug-ins for Native Instruments, and for Ampeg SVT, and so sometimes I cheat and use my own presets on my Guitar Rig 6.”



COOL GROOVES SCARY GOLDINGS

Feel (2021)



“This is the organist Larry Goldings getting together with the Scary Pockets guys, and me on bass. Ryan Lerman and Jack Conti are the bosses, then there’s a rolling set of sidemen. Lemar Carter was on drums. We also had Roland Gajate-Garcia on percussion, Josh Smith on guitar, Louis Cole on drums, and various singers. It was mostly improvised, and some of it is kind of groovy. It has funk elements and also happy-sounding punk.

“We just started jamming, establishing a riff and taking it places, so I’d start playing something, then someone else would come up with a B section or some other chord changes—it was a real collective effort. I used my ’68 P-Bass on one track, and the rest of the time it’s either the hollow-body, or the DeArmond Starfire, or the Nordstrand Acinonyx Cat, which is a really good bass, especially at its price point. Hollow-bodies are very prevalent right now in indie-rock, and I like finding interesting-sounding basses. It can change the vibe of the tune, the sound of the bass.

“These days I’m 50-50 about using a pick—I’m not afraid of it. You know, a lot of those old B-movie soundtracks had converted guitar players on bass. I use a Dunlop .60—a lighter pick. It really helps with string jumps and flying around the neck.”



WILD CARD RACHEL SERMANNI

Swallow Me (2021)



“I’ve been trying to play more singer-songwriter, super-tranquil, mellow stuff. Fin Greenall—or Fink—was producing Rachel, who is a Scottish songwriter, and he got me playing my upright on this. Any time I pick up the upright, people don’t expect it!

“I’m on ‘Brighton House’ with this arpeggio stuff going on. It’s funny—I try and make my bass sound darker and bigger because it happens to be pretty thin-sounding. I have to trick stuff, whenever it’s cool—and in this genre it’s pretty important to have a dark-sounding upright. So don’t chord-lead too much, don’t keep pushing, don’t do too much activity from one part to another.

“You can have a frill here and there, but it’s really just a matter of making big, beautiful sounds and letting the song breathe, with Fin on guitars and whatever else, Ruben Hein the pianist, Tomer Blum doing lots of stuff, plus Tobias Humble or Nicky Hustinx on drums.

“People think I’m the ‘fusion guy’ and okay, I get it, but some of my very favorite music is songwriter-based. Nick Drake, Joni Mitchell—it’s unbelievable how great that stuff is. I’m producing some songwriters too, and for me it’s a natural fit, and certainly a natural progression.”



DISASTER SESSIONS UNNAMED R&B PROJECT

Unreleased (1999)



“I was living in New York and a bunch of my friends were riding with this R&B group. At the time I was playing with Wayne Krantz, and not really exposing myself to rhythm and blues. I went into the session and I just didn’t know how to do what they wanted. They were like, ‘Just do this, and that’, assuming that I knew my stuff. But I didn’t, because I was still really young.

“As a bassist, I’d been highly recommended, but when I had to play on a tune, I couldn’t handle it. Once you lose your confidence and start fucking up it’s like, ‘Oh boy’ and it’s an avalanche. I don’t think if I even finished the tune.

“In the pre-internet days you couldn’t just get emailed a tune in advance. I made sure from then on, that if someone called on me for a session I would make sure it was something I knew how to do. It’s such a good lesson.

“Later, I came back to that project, this time on upright bass, and I was confident, improvising, plucking around—and they loved that. When Bowie came to see that gig, it was an absolute fucking disaster. The amp kept cutting out, the power fell out the wall—and there was Bowie with Toni Visconti and Maria Schneider. What a disaster—or so I thought.”

THE Lowdown

I WAS THERE!

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

The great Victor Bailey headed to the great jam in the sky in 2016: We salute him

Few bassists ever built as distinguished a resume as the late Victor Bailey, who passed away five years ago at the age of 56. A valued member of Weather Report from 1982 to '86 and also a touring and recording partner for Sonny Rollins, Madonna, Sting, and others, Bailey didn't so much play the bass as embody it.

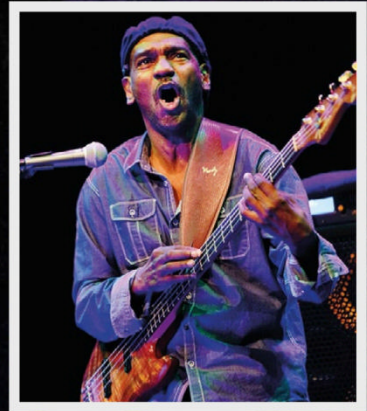
Victor's career as a bassist started with humble roots, he told us in 2009: "My first bass was a tiny little Fender Musicmaster, candy-apple red with a white pickguard. It's like a Fender Mustang bass, but with a split pickup. I was very short until I was 18 years old, so I needed a little bass. My parents got me the Musicmaster: it was Fender's cheapest model, but let me tell you, it was a fine-sounding instrument."

Listing a prestigious range of players as his heroes ("Ron Carter, Stanley Clarke, Alphonso Johnson, Jaco Pastorius, Larry Graham, Louis Johnson, Jimmy Garrison, Percy Heath, Paul Chambers, and Anthony Jackson"), Bailey always stressed the importance of finding an individual approach.

"I play four-string," he explained. "By the time five- and six-string basses became fashionable, I already had a style and a lot of success—there was no need to change. Most importantly, I already had my sound, and you don't want to change that when you have it, because so few players have one. But I have nothing against five- or six-strings. Those instruments have certainly expanded the range of the bass guitar, and lots of guys are doing great things with them."

In addition, he knew that trying to identify the greatest bassist of all time is futile, explaining: "There's no such thing as the greatest. You'd have to have a very small musical perspective to think that one person was the best. There are so many different styles of music, and varying styles of bass-playing within those musics. Nowadays, it seems that a lot of people get caught up in who is the greatest in some book. In my time we never asked anything about the greatest—we just listened to everybody and everything." ■





Bailey in full artistic flow.

Low Life

Welcome back, bassists! Let's talk about one-off shows.

Many of us have a regular gig with our own bands, or we may be fortunate enough to join a touring band for an artist's album promo cycle. These scenarios allow us to relax into the familiarity of the material and live show, often providing plenty of repeat performances which increase our confidence and potential earnings.

They also make it worth the time we invest in learning the material, curating the right sounds, building an appropriate rig, and then attending the rehearsals—as we know that there will be some longevity to these gigs.

With one-off shows, however, we don't always have that same comfort and ease—and so we perhaps need to reframe how we approach these situations. You might initially think 'What is my incentive for putting all of that time and effort into preparation,

when it's just for one show?' I understand those of us who may turn these opportunities down, as it's easy to feel that the effort outweighs higher-priority motivators such as payment.

Still, there is so much reward to come out of these one-offs other than money, such as the chance to meet new musicians, each one a possible source for other gigs in the future, which could prove to be more lucrative. It's also a ripe opportunity to flex your session skills by calling on ear training, transcription, memorization, discipline, time management, researching, equipment experimentation,

and more—all of which are worthwhile pursuits in the grander scheme of your own musical development.

Confronting our own anxieties and stepping outside of our comfort zones are great opportunities for personal growth. You'll hear many professionals sharing the usual advice of simply saying 'yes' to whatever comes your way, and it is this mentality that really creates those opportunities off the back of accepting a one-off. You never know who you will be working with, who will be watching, and when they may need a bassist.

ONE-OFF SHOWS

Should you accept a one-time-only gig?



Maximize your live bass playing with Tax The Heat bassist and BIMM Senior Lecturer Antonio Angotti.



BIMM
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Lastly, think of the other aspects to taking on a one-off gig. It might be the opportunity to play with friends, play with revered musicians, play for a noteworthy artist or band, play for profile or association, play for the buzz of a big audience, play at a bucket-list venue, play a new style or genre, or just to play... Remember to say yes, because there's a lot to squeeze out of any gig that comes our way. ■

The Woodshed

Despite having never offered active pickups in any of our basses, we are regularly confronted with the question, 'Do you ever use passive pickups?' If we have, in fact, never offered active pickups, why are these inquiries so persistent?

There is a pervasive misconception among many guitar and bass players that any pickup without exposed poles or visible magnets is an active pickup. This is simply not true, as the overwhelming majority of magnetic pickups available on the market are actually passive devices—so how did this fallacy become so commonplace?

Most bass players' first exposure to pickups without exposed poles was in the early Seventies, when companies like Alembic and Bartolini began offering passive pickups without visible magnets. Then, in 1976, active pickup manufacturer EMG appeared with their now well-known products. It would

be easy to blame the long-standing confusion around active pickups on EMG's successful early marketing efforts, but another more conspicuous new product arrived in 1976 that made an immediate contribution which was arguably more influential.

In 1976, after nearly 10 years away from the spotlight, Leo Fender introduced his new Music Man Stingray bass, as seen on our cover this month. This revolutionary new instrument made waves as the first production bass to incorporate active electronics. While others, most notably

Alembic, may have offered them first, at that time no brand could rival the influence, or capture the attention of so many, as Leo Fender and his new creation. The era of the active bass had officially begun.

From that year forward, companies large and small began incorporating active tone circuits into their instruments. While many also used pickups that were meant to mimic the external appearance of EMG and Bartolini, few of them were active devices. The marketing allure of the 'active bass' had become its own currency, and it didn't really matter if the

POLES APART

Don't judge a pickup by its cover.



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

circuits offered were of good quality—a nine-volt battery was the only thing required to captivate and ensnare prospective buyers.

And so the common reference to basses with active preamp circuits became associated with the appearance of pickups without visible poles or exposed magnets. The 'active' in 'active bass' is most commonly offered in reference to the unseen electronics hidden within the bass, and far less frequently to the pickups, which are out in the open for all to see. There is a lesson there for all of us. ■

There is a misconception that any pickup without exposed poles is active



Nik Preston takes us through three ways to exploit this useful theory

MASTER SLASH CHORDS

Hello! One of the most perplexing conventions for bassists can be the conventions around slash chord symbols and their associated harmony. When looking at—and hearing—harmony from a root-first perspective, the notion of why we may need to denote a chord with a particular note at the bottom can sometimes seem unnecessarily complex. And, if I'm really honest, sometimes it is! But the convention exists, most often for good reason, and as a result, needs to be as understood and applicable as any other type of chord symbol we may encounter.

We'll attempt to demystify some of the reasons for the use of particular slash chords this month. Let's start at the simpler end. Put simply, when the note on the bottom of a slash chord—the note to the right of

the / symbol—actually exists in the chord above it, that chord is in inversion. The most obvious example is C/E: The E is the major third of the C major chord, so this is simply a C major in first inversion. Likewise Cmin/E $\flat$, which is a Cmin in first inversion.

There are a great many situations when it would be most efficient for us to use a slash chord to denote a chord in inversion, most often because the composition or arrangement requires a particular bass movement and standard notation isn't being employed.

In contrast, if the lowest note in the slash chord symbol is *not* a chord tone which is found in the chord above it, the note on the bottom is normally the root note. If we find ourselves faced with navigating a chord chart without having learned these types of chords in advance, we sometimes have to calculate

exactly which chord we are accompanying or describing. This is obviously not ideal...

As with most things we discuss here, familiarization is the real key. As daunting as any new concept or technique may seem, it is all achievable once we become familiar enough—but be mindful to familiarize your ear. It nearly always stays in our long-term memory once we can genuinely hear it.

This is a large topic, so we are just illustrating the concept in a simple key and with simple bass-lines in order to highlight the importance of the harmonic movement. As always, take it slowly, and leave the practice room with more options than you entered it with!!

EXERCISE 1

Here, you'll see that the movement is predicated on the notation of the slash chords—in other words, the bassist is being asked to do something specific from the chord symbols alone. Had the first two chords not been notated as slash chords, and without the notes being notated on the staff, we would have likely lost the chromatic bass movement leading from E down to C.

EXERCISE 2

This introduces our other category of slash chord. E/C is a subtly contrasting example: In this instance, the note on the bottom (C) is not a chord tone of the Emaj triad above it, and as such, the C is actually the root. This makes this chord a Cmaj7#5 (C, E, G#, B). Simply put, this convention is normally employed when the chord progression requires the root note again to be specific—in other words, the composer or arranger doesn't wish the bassist to play a note which may put this chord in inversion. You can sometimes see this approach when the bass note remains static and the chords above move repeatedly.

EXERCISE 3

This exercise offers a selection of both types of slash chord, and is another example of what we may come across in a real-world situation, albeit with a slightly more complex progression. You'll see that there is a selection which points to the bass note being either the root of the slash chord, or a chord tone of it, and as a result, the bass movement becomes a specific feature of its harmonic passage. Take it slowly, and enjoy! ■

EXERCISE ONE

C/E Cm/E $\flat$ D7(b9) D $\flat$ Δ7 CΔ7

EXERCISE TWO

F/G G7(b9) E/C CΔ7(#11)

EXERCISE THREE

CΔ7 Cm7/E $\flat$ Dm7 D $\flat$ Δ7 E/C CΔ9 F/G C/G

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STILL RAGING

Rage Against The Machine bassist **Tim Commerford** has finally found his dream Music Man Stingray – and we get to play it first!

Words: Kevin Johnson, Joel McIver
Photograph: Kevin Winter

COM

an, I can't wait for people to see this bass," said Tim Commerford when we spoke to him earlier this year. "It's so beautiful. It does everything I need, and way more. I've played some beautiful basses in my time, but this one has to be one of the very best ones that I've ever played. Ernie Ball really did a spectacular job on it. We went back and

forth on it until we got it perfectly right."

For the past two years, Ernie Ball Music Man has been steadily introducing signature instruments for heroes of the low end, including Vulfpeck's Joe Dart, Dream Theater's John Myung, MxPx's Mike Herrera, and AC/DC's Cliff Williams. Each one uses the basic template of an existing model with slight tweaks to personalize it to the player. So far, that has mostly meant streamlining electronics and controls.

Tim Mosenfelter/Getty



Their latest collaboration with Tim Commerford follows the same blueprint except for the less-is-more concept. Instead, the Rage Against The Machine, Audioslave, and Prophets Of Rage bassist has worked with the company to come up with four variants of the StingRay: a passive full-scale, an active full-scale, a passive short-scale, and an active short-scale.

The basses all have standard pickups and controls and have been streamlined in production numbers: Each version is limited to just 50 units worldwide. We got our hands on one of the active short-scale models to see if the little beast can muster the monstrous tones for which Commerford is known.

As with any short-scale, this bass feels small as soon as you take it out of the case, but its construction makes it feel solid as a rock. It's crafted with an ash body in a natural finish with a black pickguard—a configuration which Commerford latched onto by way of slap legend Louis Johnson—as well as a maple neck and fingerboard. The neck has a gunstock oil and hand-rubbed special wax blend finish, leaving it silky smooth to the touch. The whole package weighs in at just over seven pounds, which I found to be light enough to sling around, but heavy enough to feel substantial.

Aside from what we think of as a classic StingRay, there are two main features that are unique to Commerford's new axe. First is the height-adjustable finger ramp, which sits snugly against the bass's single neodymium

humbucker. It offers an extra couple of inches of thumb real estate to find your sweet spot for plucking. Its height is set simply with four screws to line it up with your pickup. Conversely, you can lower it all the way to be flush with the pickguard.

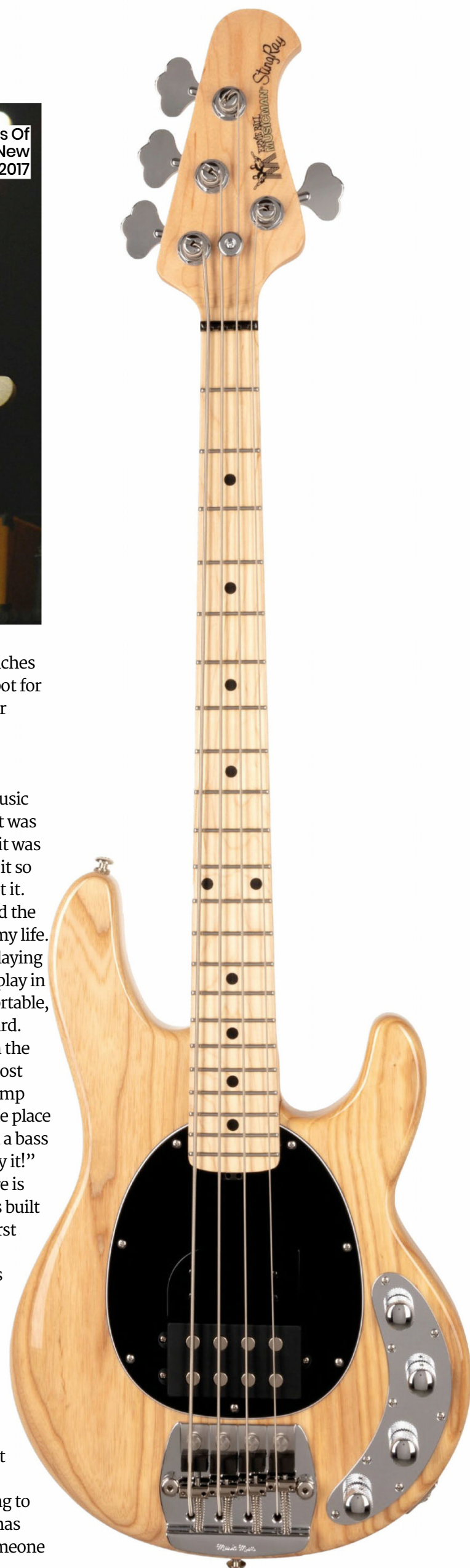
"I was 18 years old when I first saw a Music Man Stingray," explains Commerford. "It was a blonde one with a black pickguard, and it was at a pawnshop, and it was \$300. I wanted it so bad, and I scraped up the money, and I got it. That bass was the one that I used to record the first Rage record, and it was a big part of my life. At that time I was pretty much glued to playing right over the pickup, but I've learned to play in different ways so my hand is more comfortable, so I added a piece of plastic to the pickguard.

This wasn't anything like we're seeing on the new bass, which is the most high-tech version of a ramp and the most comfortable place I've ever put my hand on a bass guitar. I'm blown away by it!"

The second new feature is the adjustable mute pads built into the bass's bridge. First found on early StingRay models, the system gives each string its own foam pad that can be raised or lowered, using a thumbscrew. The screws sit directly under the string, so you have to reach in between the strings to adjust. Rounding out the spec list is a fine set of hardware with a compensated nut, slick lightweight tuners, and a string-thru-body bridge.

"This bridge is the most incredible thing to me," explains Commerford, "because it has these mutes on it—and the mutes, as someone

Commerford's powerful sound has been captured in an extremely comfortable package





TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | \$2,999
Made in | USA
Body | Ash
Neck | Select maple, 30"
Neck joint | Five-bolt, sculpted neck joint
Nut width | 38.1 mm
Fingerboard | Maple
Frets | 22 high-profile stainless steel
Pickups | Single humbucker with neodymium magnets
Electronics | Three-band active 18-volt preamp
Controls | Volume, treble, mid, bass
Hardware | Custom Music Man tuners, string-thru-body bridge with mutes
Weight | 7.3 lbs
Case/gig bag included? | Yes
Left-hand option available? | No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Big sound, great feel
Minus | There aren't enough of them
Overall | You don't have to be a Tim C fan to appreciate a bass that's this well done; it just helps

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY



SOUND QUALITY



VALUE



HAVING A BALL

Commerford on his Ernie Ball history

"Back in 2015 I was approached by Brian Ball, who's the grandson of Ernie Ball, and he wanted to make me a bass. He gave me this Music Man StingRay—I think they call it the HH model. I was blown away by the construction, by the way that it sounds, the way it plays acoustically in my living room. I plug it in and I have to drastically change my settings on my amps: It sounded really, really good with my set-up.

"For Prophets Of Rage, Music Man made me these Stingrays, which are the HS models. They are the closest thing I have ever felt to a Steinberger bass. There isn't a single dead spot on the neck, because they have this integrated nut so everything on the bass is just smoothed out. When it comes to hitting really hard, you don't have to worry about your fingers hitting a sharp magnet or anything like it. Everything is just so solid and they just feel really good.

"Over the years people have come to me and told me they wanted to make a bass for me, and I've always shied away from it, but with Music Man I'm really happy to say that this is a bass I'm part of, and that it was not made using exploitation of humans. It was made in a really awesome factory in San Luis Obispo where people are looked after and are happy. That happiness shows in how beautifully this instrument is made. This is the dopest bass that you can get!" ■



Laying it down with Audioslave, back in 2003

Paul Nolin/Audioslave

TIM COMMERFORD, RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

who enjoys playing with distorted bass, in layman's terms these mutes eliminate all the noise that you don't want to hear. There's certain noises that I like, and certain ones that I don't, and this is the only bridge that does that."

Short-scale basses are always a treat for me, but this one is especially fun to play. The solid construction is coupled with small details for extra comfort. Aside from the finger ramp, the pickup's screw slots are sloped for comfort across the entire range. My inclination was to keep the finger ramp level with the pickup for a balanced feel. I did drop it all the way down for some pick playing, which really hit the spot.

As for sounds, there's no getting away from it—this is a StingRay. Even though short-scales tend to be darker-sounding, the pickup sounds just like you might expect: Super punchy with a snarling midrange. The pickup and electronics were dead silent, making this a great option for studio work as well as the stage. The three-band EQ also adds to this factor; each control's voicing is highly musical. Dialling in a little bass added a warm heft rather than any tubbiness. The mids merely accent the punch, while the treble knob added top end bite. I did find that I leaned toward turning up the bass to add a bit more girth to the natural sound.

Before even getting to the EQ, there are tons of fun to be had with the mute pads. I spent

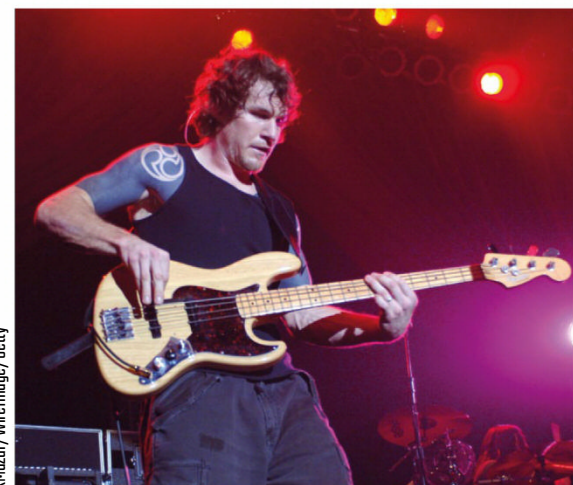


With it all to prove in 1992

Linsey Blige/Getty

a good long while just geeking out on adjusting the mutes between lightly touching the strings and squashing into them. Commerford explains he uses them to dampen overtones when kicking on his overdrives. This certainly does the trick, but I had just as much fun exploring its vintage textures. You can jam RATM's 'Bombtrack' on this bass just as easily as Tyrone Davis's 'If I Could Turn Back The Hands Of Time'. You can also get creative, leaving the low strings for bass notes and chording on muted higher strings for interesting textures.

This bass is American made and carries a price tag to match, but simply put, EBMM has knocked it out of the park with this bass. Even in a smaller setup, they've captured Commerford's powerful sound in an extremely comfortable package. This bass doesn't need to have his name on it to be great, but it does live up to his reputation. Let's just hope that the models continue beyond this limited edition run! ■



KMazur/WireImage/Getty

CLASSIC CUTS

Two Rage Against The Machine bass parts that you have to hear

'BULLET IN THE HEAD'

"It's very much like Cypress Hill: Listen to their first record and 'How I Could Just Kill A Man.' It's almost the same bass-line. Zack [de la Rocha, RATM singer] and I would listen to that album when we were driving to Los Angeles from Orange County to Rage rehearsals. We wore the cassette out, we played it so much. Those bass-lines were completely sick. Hip-hop has never really been as good since then."

'TAKE THE POWER BACK'

"Every band that I've ever been in, whether it's Rage, Audioslave, Future User, whatever, everything is organic and starts in the room. Some idea, whether it's a drum beat or a bass-line, happens, and we're like, 'How about this? And how about this? Oh, that's cool' and then it snowballs and builds. That riff was a spontaneous kind of thing, like 'That part will sound good with this part.'"

WORK RATE

Two TC side projects to investigate

7D7D

This project, featuring Mathias Wakrat on drums and Laurent Grangeon on guitar, combines hardcore punk and jazz fusion. As Tim told us, "I've never been in a band like this. Laurent and Mathias write the arrangements, work it out and they hand it off to me. That's how we got started—they asked me if I wanted to play bass over their tracks and I was like, 'Let me hear them.' When I heard them I said, 'Wow, that's some seriously crazy music!' It's pushed me to try to play 16th notes with three fingers. For the album we did, I recorded the music with a Lakland Joe Osborn Jazz bass."

How does he cope with delivering vocals as well as bass, we ask?

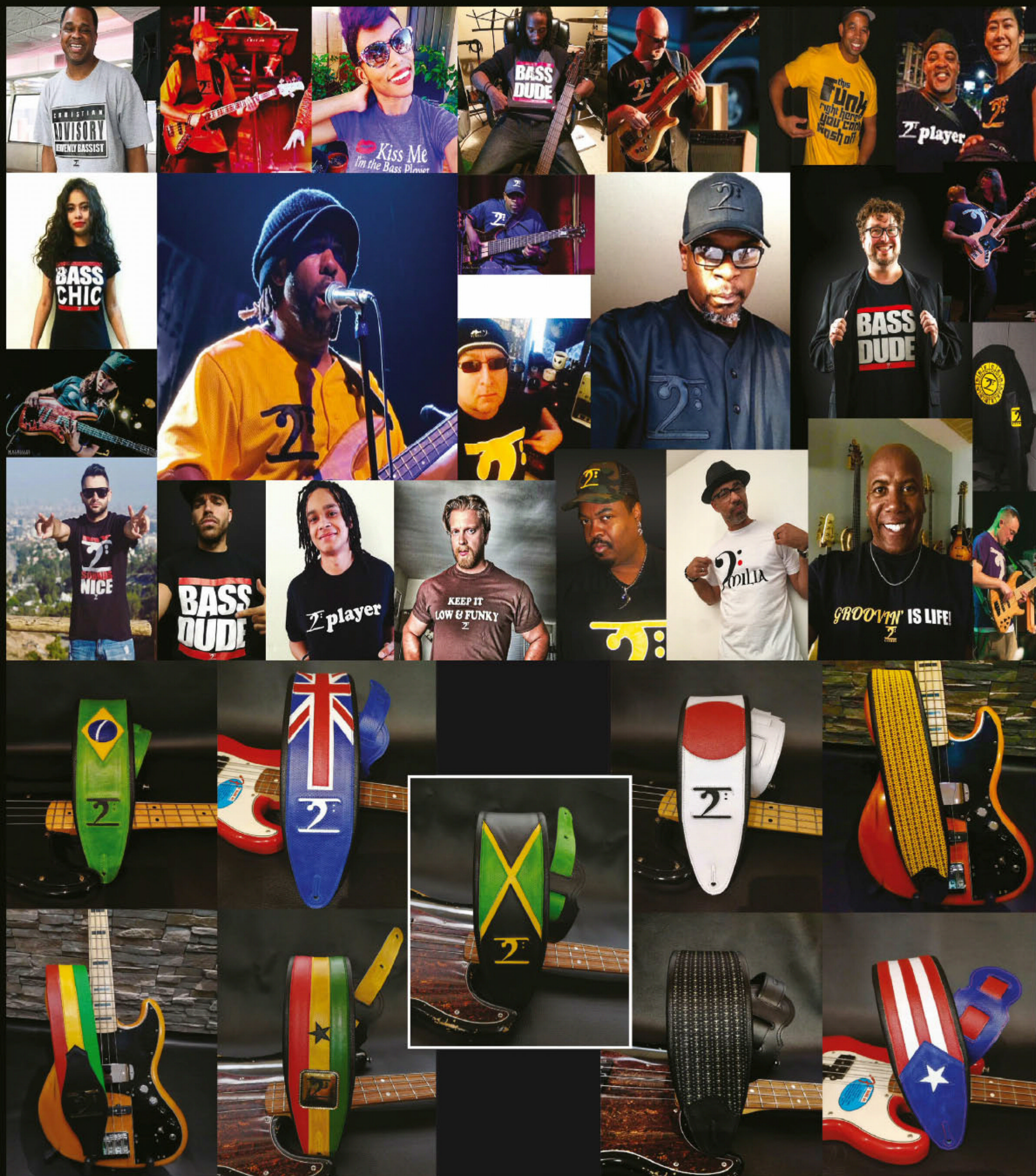
"Wrapping my head around odd time signatures was tough. Outside of learning King Crimson songs or Pink Floyd's 'Money' when I was a kid, I had never previously done anything like this or played any music in odd time signatures. It took me a while to get my head around that."

"Learning when to breathe was a big part of it," he explains. "I've never had to focus on that before. I have to breathe or else I'm not going to be able to pull off that bass part or that singing part. At the end of the day, I'm a bass player and my main focus goes into playing the bass. I'm still learning how to be a singer and I'm still learning how to play and look people in the eye and have conviction."

FUTURE USER

Commerford plus keyboardist/programmer Jordan Tarlow and drummer Jon Knox self-released a Future User album in 2015 called *#SteroidsOrHeroin*, accompanied by a couple of eye-opening promo videos. In the first, 'Clockwork', Commerford put on a gimp mask and subjected his chum John McEnroe (yep, the tennis player) to actual—not simulated—waterboarding. In the next, 'Mountain Lion', Commerford went for a merry bike ride with chum Armstrong, and then had his naked torso set on fire. Yes, set on fire—and he used his own blood to color the vinyl used for the album. ■

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BEET THIS

Australian double bass player
Helen Svoboda takes her musical
inspirations from unexpected sources.
We hear her plant-astic story

Interview: Joel McIver

The solo and collaborative bass player Helen Svoboda has been on an unorthodox musical journey since she began her recording career, finding inspiration in areas where most of us wouldn't think to look. Recently returned to her native Australia after overseas study, she continues to add to her resume with Meatshell—a duo with her partner, the saxophonist Andrew Saragossi—and with her work as a solo artist, in a chamber trio called Sprout, and in an upcoming large-scale audiovisual work about mass food production.

Where are you based these days, Helen?

I'm in Melbourne, Australia, but I was studying in Europe for two years before that. I count myself really lucky that I moved to Europe when I did. I was studying in the Netherlands and in Cologne, Germany for two years doing my Masters degree, but I moved back to Melbourne in July 2020, as soon as Covid-19 started ramping up.

How do you define your music?

It started out being really jazzy, because that was the music I was studying, but it's morphed into experimental folk. That's really how I define a lot of the things that I do now.

What were you studying in Europe?

I studied at the conservatory in Maastricht, which is in the south of the Netherlands: My degree was a Masters in Jazz Performance.

That can really mean anything, but I ended up focusing on solo double bass composition. The focus of my research was the use of the extended techniques that I was learning from my teachers in Cologne and in the Netherlands, and applying them to solo composition, in a kind of non-daunting way, which led to my album, *Vegetable Bass*.

How do vegetables connect to bass playing?

I've always, almost subconsciously, ended up forming heaps of bands with vegetable names. I've always loved nature and I'm a vegetarian—I've always been the vegetable person at a gathering who just eats lots of carrots and whatever. For me, it was a way of centring my soloistic journey on the double bass in a way that enabled me to create a portfolio in a unified sense. It wasn't like I was writing 'Untitled Piece Number One' that uses a certain technique, or 'Untitled Piece Number Two' that uses another—it was more about trying to define an identity around the music, through envisioning what vegetable it may have depicted.

Give us an example?

Well, let's take beetroot. That's quite a sweet vegetable, so 'Beetroot In Blossom', which is one of the tracks on *Vegetable Bass*, is quite a sweet and optimistic piece. On the other hand, black radish is a very bitter kind of

vegetable, which informed the extended techniques that I chose for the song I wrote about it, such as the harsh striking of the frog [the hair-gripping end] of the bow onto the string.

Tell us about your gear.

My double bass is from the Netherlands, made by a luthier in Maastricht called Jan Knooren. When I moved overseas two years ago, I needed a bass very quickly, and I got a grant from the Australian Council Of The Arts, so I was able to get a new instrument. I asked my teachers where I could go to get a bass that was close to where I was, and I went to Jan's workshop, which was just full of these incredible instruments. It's a beautiful bass. I like it because it has quite a narrow top, like a French-style top, so it's good for what I do. I don't need a huge-bodied instrument for orchestral playing, for example. I brought it back with me. It was quite a quite a task to get it shipped over to Australia, but it eventually arrived. Before that I had a very cheap bass from the local music store in Brisbane, where I'm from. That one was fine, but it was special to finally get an instrument that I could call my own and have a connection with it.

Do you mic up or go direct to record?

I prefer it to be mic'ed up, because I want it to sound as acoustic as possible. With a lot of the extended techniques in the arco that I do, I find that going through an amplifier really diminishes the effect of the sounds. It just doesn't capture everything. If I'm playing a gig, I just go through a Realist pickup most of the time. So for me, being as acoustic as possible is key. I don't use any effects, although I do on electric bass, which I play in

"I want to maximize the potential of what double bass can do"

a band called The Biology Of Plants. I use a Maton bass in that band—it's the only bass guitar I've ever owned. My parents got it for me as a graduation present, 10 years ago. With that, I go through a Big Muff distortion and an MXR octave pedal. It's quite basic. Occasionally I'll do double bass gigs with a bit of echo pedal—that's really fun.

You recently released an album called *Dormant, I Lay* that was just you multi-tracking bass on a Zoom H4 unit.

I recorded that a year ago, after *Vegetable Bass*, during the European lockdown. I was really finding it hard to practice over those few months, because I was writing my thesis, locked in this one-room studio in the Netherlands. But I found that the way that I could get on the instrument and feel inspired was to try multi-tracking. It was really fun,

because it was so DIY: I mixed it myself, and got a friend to master it. It was a nice kind of culmination of all the techniques that I'd learned in my time in Europe.

Talk to us about your work with overtone series. What have you done in that area?

My thesis, and the *Vegetable Bass* album, were both very much focused around using the overtone series in different ways—whether that meant using overtones in their basic fundamental forms, or as artificial harmonics, or pulled harmonics. I may use them purely as they are, or with them juxtaposed or contrasted with extended techniques like the bow ricochet, or different pizzicato techniques. The overtone series resonates with me so much, and continues to do so, so I'm looking into doing a PhD to continue research on it.

Why do you find overtones so fascinating?

The reason they really resonate with me is because they're what got me singing along with the bass in the first place, because I realized that all the overtones in their different forms are in my vocal range. That created a really nice unity with the instrument that took it out of the traditional role that I've always played it in—so suddenly, I wasn't playing this bass-playing role. I was going into cello and violin territory, which was really liberating. I just got fascinated with how there's this full series on the instrument, but I'd never been taught about it.

How are you investigating this subject?

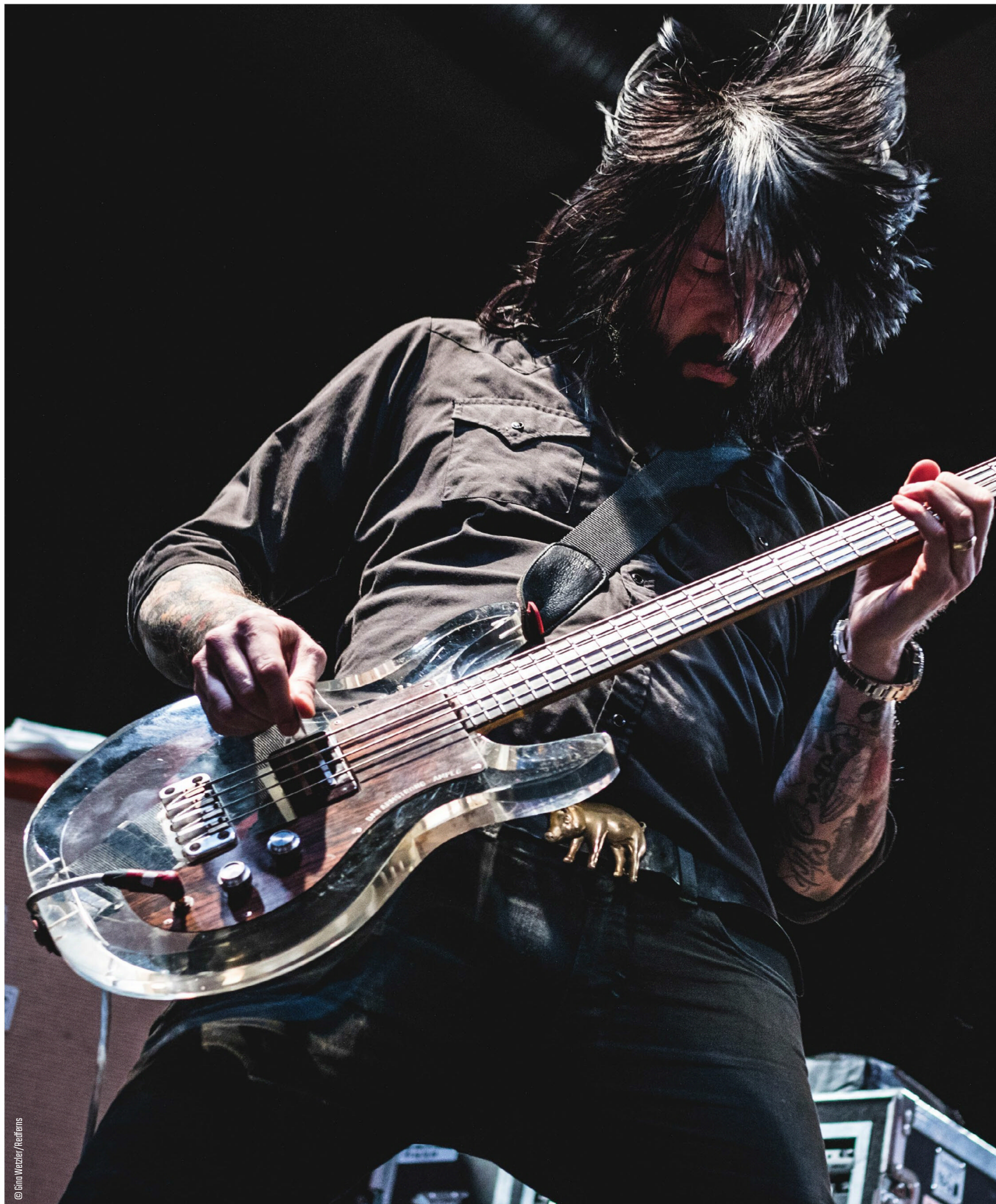
Well, there's just so much more to learn about it: Everything I do keeps unlocking new possibilities. I'm loving trying different tunings at the moment, doing scordatura [alternate] tunings and seeing which different overtone combinations can come out of them. I'll detune some of the strings, and I'll use different tunings. Overtones have been such a amazing asset to finding new approaches or sounds, because I don't know what's going to come out—I'm just intuitively exploring the instrument.

Given everything we've talked about, it seems that your goal is to push the envelope and do things differently.

That's totally what I'm trying to do, and it's what keeps me going. I want to maximize the potential of what the double bass can do. I was taught a very specific style of jazz bass playing when I was younger, and I still love doing that—but I think there was so much that I didn't uncover in my early studies, and I'm so grateful to be uncovering it now. ■

Info: www.helensvoboda.com







FARM HANDS

Jesse Keeler from Death From Above welcomes us into his rural hideaway, for a chat about his new album.

Interview: Joel McIver **Photography:** Getty

“I’ve been a farmer for a while,” says Jesse Keeler, bassist with the Canadian duo Death From Above. “I live in a 198-year-old farmhouse, about halfway between Toronto and Ottawa. When I was a kid, I was interested in the concept of having a place out in the country, because I wanted to make my own Big Pink.”

He’s referring here to the Big Pink country house in New York state where Bob Dylan and The Band recorded in 1967. “My dad, Fred Keeler, grew up with all those guys, because he was a musician too. They were all friends and they all shared gear and stuff. He had a fair bit of success in Canada. You know, he’d be opening for the Rolling Stones, and he was the first guitar player in Triumph, and stuff like that. But he was always a player:

I don’t think he wanted to be a star. He certainly didn’t want to be famous. He just wanted to play, and he figured that at some point, people would give him money for doing a good job. Paul Butterfield asked him to be his guitar player. That’s so crazy. He didn’t even tell me that—I had to hear that from one of his friends.”

He adds: “So the idea of being out here, making music, was always very idealized for me. I always thought that what I wanted was to be out in the woods, in a house that was also a studio. We have three studios here, and live rooms in the basement. Our new record was mastered right here.”

This sounds pretty idyllic, I remark. “I don’t say this lightly, but the pandemic time has been the best for me,” he explains. “It’s been my favorite time of my entire adult life, for sure, because nothing here has changed. My kids have still been on the beach, just hanging out, doing everything the same as always. It really gave us licence to be completely self-serving, just cranking away and making music and being noisy. I always figured that I would end up doing some day off in the future. I thought, ‘When I’m totally done with everything, I’ll get a place in the country’. But I sold my house in the city, and I’m doing it now—and not way off in the

future. I’m fulfilling my childhood dream.”

Keeler and his Death From Above partner, Sebastien Grainger, have a new album out, *Is For Lovers*, their fourth

“We recorded constantly, in one room, and pretty much wrote one song a day for six weeks”

since their formation in 2001. It was made a little differently to their previous releases, he explains.

“Normally, what we do is, I write a bunch of stuff and Sebastien writes a bunch of stuff, we get together and decide which songs to use, then we go to downtown Los Angeles and dump a bunch of demos in front of the producer. But this time, we knew we were gonna do it ourselves. We had always wanted to produce and complete a record ourselves, partially just because we have the ability to do it. I master people’s records, for example, but I hadn’t mastered any of our stuff. Seb produces records for other people, but he

★ Players

JESSE KEELER, DEATH FROM ABOVE

hadn't produced a record for us. So we knew we could do it."

He continues: "At the same time, we knew that without a producer, we were not going to have a third vote on anything. When there's only two people working on something, you can't be a democracy—you have to agree to do something or it doesn't happen—and the only way you can really work that way is to be together. So we went down to LA for six weeks, and we literally wrote every single day. We recorded constantly, all in one room, with the drums in the same room as us. We would just hit record, so that everything was being tracked, and then just go in and write. We pretty much wrote a song every day, the entire time I was there."

"I took my time mastering the new album, because we didn't know when it was going to come out. I actually did it seven times—the version that you've heard is master seven. Normally you release records around a touring cycle, but at a certain point we were like, 'We can't just keep sitting on this thing. Maybe the world will open up, maybe it won't. Maybe no-one will ever tour again, but this record still needs to come out'."

Is bass Keeler's primary songwriting instrument, I ask? "Ninety percent of the time, yeah, because I find that if a part or an idea comes into my head, I need to very quickly make it into an actual part, or else the notes in my head drift, if that makes sense. Either I'll use the phone recorder and hum or sing my part into it, or I'll grab the bass and make the part into a real thing. What did it say on one of those Sonic Youth records—that once the music leaves your head, the compromises start? When an idea pops into my head, it literally has to be something that exists for real—it has to exist on the bass."

Keeler is often seen with a particular transparent bass, I mention. "Oh, I love my Dan Armstrongs—they're great," he says.

"I have a luthier friend out here who designed a new bridge for them. It has the same screws in the exact same spot, because you can't screw in and out of [the Armstrongs' body material] Lucite a bunch of times. The new bridges have individual string intonation and height, and brass saddles. I added a brass nut too, and I had to have them re-fretted. I had Luminlay glow-in-the-dark dots put on them as well, which is really just for the stage—I like to look down and see that I'm where I intended to be."

He adds: "All my pickups are from Dan Armstrong's son, Kent. I've bought probably eight pickups from him over the years since I've been using them. There hasn't been one that I didn't enjoy. Sometimes you might see



me using a single coil, and sometimes you might see me with a humbucker—it's really down to what Kent feels like sending."

How did he end up playing Armstrongs? "Well, I started with a Gibson Grabber that I've fully restored over the years—it's got the ebony fingerboard and everything. I had to switch the bridge for a Badass because the original was hurting my hand too much. That bass has been everywhere, but I went to this music store in Toronto, and I saw a Dan Armstrong bass, and I thought it looked really cool. When I tried it, I was like, 'Wow, this neck is so small and so comfortable to play, and I've got all these extra frets. This is

awesome!' I think it was 1200 bucks, so I bought it.

"We had a show that night, opening for somebody, so

I thought 'I'm gonna use my new bass' and I went to play the Dan Armstrong. In the first song, one of the tuning pegs snapped off, so I quickly took it off and grabbed the Gibson again. Next day, I take the Dan Armstrong back to the music store and I'm like, 'Guys, this just broke'. They said 'Well, we've got this 1971 Rickenbacker 4001 that we can exchange for you with no paperwork'."

Nice deal. "It really was," he says. "So I played that Rick for years, right up until we broke up the band in 2006. When we decided to play again five years later, I went to pick up that Rickenbacker, and I tried to tune it, but nothing could be done because the truss rods were cranked as hard as they could go. They were like fucking coathangers! I asked my

luthier friend about it, and he said, 'Well, you know, that's the nature of bass necks—once they bow beyond a certain point, there's nothing you can do'.

"Now, I wasn't gonna replace the neck of a 1971 Rickenbacker—it would just be a new bass—so I thought, 'I think I should try a Dan Armstrong again'. It had been a long time, but I never got over the idea of it. I really missed that neck. So I found one, and that is still my number one bass, and then I bought a second one."

Has he always been a four-string player? "I have a friend that plays a five-string bass, and he's always saying, 'You'll love it, man, you can go down further'. But I always tune a full step down, so I'm content with that. The way I write bass parts is that I try to make up songs that I can't play at first. I want it to be an annoying, painful thing at first, and then eventually I'll play it like it's nothing, hopefully."

"There's one song on the new record called 'Free Animal' that sounds pretty easy to play, but when I'm playing that bass part it's like a tongue-twister for my fingers. Most of it is between open strings and the 22nd fret, and there's a bend on the 24th fret too. Because my hands are busy doing other parts, to do that high bend, I have to do it with my pinkie—but you only have so much force with that finger, right? But I tell myself, 'I did it on the record, I can do it live, and eventually, it'll be easy'. So that's why four strings and 24 frets is enough for me. More than enough!"

Is For Lovers is out now.

Info: www.deathfromabove1979.com

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SIKTH SENSE

Sikth bassist **James Leach** plays bass parts so fast and complex they'll make your head hurt. We ask how he does it...

“I started playing bass in 1993, when I was 12, and my first bass came from a junk shop. It had a Fender-style neck and someone had tried to make the body. It had a single Jazz pickup and a square bit of plastic with a knob—it was pretty terrible—but once I proved to my parents that I could play it a bit, they got me a Bass Collection. Remember them? It was a pearl-white passive four-string, and obviously I sold it after a while, but I’ve actually started searching for them on eBay—even though it wasn’t that good—because it was my first one. I’d love to buy another one, just to have it again.

“Before bass, I played diatonic accordion, because my parents used to take me and my sister to folk-music gigs. By 13, I was obviously wanting to socialize with my peers, but nobody wanted to start a folk band. Some guys at my school played guitar and asked me if I would play bass, which was when I got the junk-shop bass. We never even jammed—the band just frittered away into nothing—but I really liked playing the bass, and carried on.”

“My dad said, ‘Look, if you’re going to play bass, here’s some records’ and started digging out all his old LPs from the Seventies. He gave me a Weather Report album, a Stanley Clarke album, some early Santana, and Return To Forever and Led Zeppelin. It was really good for me—he really did me a favor there. By the age 13, my head was exploding with bass, thanks to Mahavishnu Orchestra and stuff like that. I was like, ‘Oh my God, what is this?’ It was awesome.”

“The first big gig he took me to see was Santana at the Hammersmith Apollo in London, and that was pretty mind-blowing. I remember it was one of those gigs where almost every person on the stage took an



unaccompanied solo—one of those epic gigs where they were on stage for two hours, which you don’t really get to see anymore.

People give you an hour and a half and that’s it. I caught the tail end of those monster sets, I suppose.”

“Within a year after that, I guess, I formed a band at school which did ‘Naked In The Rain’ by the Red Hot Chili Peppers and ‘Road To Ruin’ by Mr. Big. Obviously we didn’t play them that well, because we were 14, but we gave it a good crack. It was difficult to know whether I got the bass parts right unless I was playing funk music or you know, Mark King, because obviously the bass is super loud, but when it came to stuff where the bass is more

subdued in the mix, my ears weren’t ready to tune into that. So maybe I got it right, but I probably got some stuff wrong.

“All these years later, I play a Manson bass. Sikth was touring in 2014, and Adrian Ashton from Mansons got in touch and said, ‘Would you like to come and try out one of our John Paul Jones basses?’ I went down there and met him and I really liked the bass. He said, ‘Do you want to take it now?’ I was like, ‘Wow!’ and I played it at the show that night. I’ve been playing it on pretty much everything ever since.

“I’ve got two twin-coil pickups on it, with coil-taps for both, so you can play with two humbuckers or you can tap them both and get a modern Jazz tone out of it—or you can use combinations of the two, like a humbucker in the bridge and a single coil at the neck, which is, I guess, Lakland-ish. That’s a popular combination. The controls are just volume, volume and tone, because when I’m playing live I’ve got a SansAmp Bass Driver and a Cog Effects Mini 66 overdrive pedal, and I’ve got amplifiers that I use for the EQ.

“I don’t really like practicing bass—it’s boring, isn’t it?—but as a kid I liked bass so much that I just used to play in my room all the time. I guess that got me to a certain level, but when I came into Sikth, I had never played in a band so loud, so heavy, and so fast. I thought I was a decent bass player, but suddenly, it was like I couldn’t hear myself. Fortunately, all of us really push each other in different ways. I don’t think I’d be at the level that I am if I hadn’t been pushed a lot by our guitarists and our drummer. That’s been massively helpful for me.

“I think when Sikth came out, people didn’t really know what to make of us, so they tried to compare us to other chaotic, heavy bands at the time, which irritated us—and I’m sure it irritated those bands, too, because they were probably from the hardcore scene when we

were coming from a much more a mainstream scene—the nu-metal movement, which was the popular metal at the time. We were absolutely sick of that

“In a youthful way, we thought to ourselves, ‘Let’s make Sikth absolutely mental!’”

style, because we felt that all the combinations of simple riffs and rhythms had all been done. This was just before the New Wave of American Heavy Metal came back, when suddenly thrash was back and all that stuff was popular again—so we tried to do something that hadn’t been done, and the only way we could think of doing that was to make things complicated. In a sort of youthful way, we thought that was the thing to do. ‘Let’s make this absolutely mental...’ ■

Instagram: @sikthofficial





BASS PHILS

Jazz, fusion, and prog are all in a day's work for the flying fingers of **Rufus Philpot**. We meet the Los Angeles-based maestro

Rufus Philpot has a long list of incredible musicians on his resume—Allan Holdsworth, Tony MacAlpine, Tool drummer Danny Carey, Virgil Donati, Derek Sherinian, Simon Phillips, vibes legend Roy Ayers, Reggie Washington, Scott Kinsey, Kirk Covington, Joel Rosenblatt, and Randy Brecker among them.

He also plays with jazz guitarist Scott Henderson as part of the Nomad Trio, and was a member of Planet X and the Virgil Donati Group for five years. He can currently be seen in the acid-jazz/funk band Down To The Bone, a trio, B.A.D., and a flamenco group, and he has taught masterclasses at the Musicians Institute, the Los Angeles Music Academy, and in Australia, England, and Sweden.

Tell us about your career as a bass player, Rufus.

I'm originally from London, and I moved to the USA in 1999. I first went out to New York in '96, just to explore, and I went to Fodera and I met Matt Garrison there. I'd just seen Matt playing the week before with the Zawinul Syndicate, who were opening up for John McLaughlin on a double-header tour that they were doing. I was playing this Fodera, and Nick Epifani walks in and he goes, 'You sound good, man. Where are you from?' I told him I was from London, and he goes, 'Oh, you play good! Did you meet Matthew?' and he introduces me to Matt Garrison. I said to him, 'I saw you with Zawinul. You sounded incredible'. He said 'Cool!' and took me down to some jam sessions, where Richard Bona was playing.

A good time to move to New York.

It really was. Richard was just taking off and becoming the next big thing. I came back in 1999, but I didn't have any gigs, so I ended up working a part-time job. I got friendly with the owner of a dive bar around the corner in Hell's Kitchen, and I got my own residency with a band there. I used to go to the Zinc Bar, which was a late-night musicians' hangout. I sat in on bass at the invitation of Latin jazz bassist John Benitez, and ended up playing with a line of guys who sat in with us, including Roy Hargrove, Mark Whitfield, and David Sanchez.

What was your big break?

Word spread a bit and I met Randy Brecker's wife, Ada Rovatti, and I played with her band Elephunk for a bit, and then I went to Ecuador with Randy and the guitarist Vinnie Valentino, who plays with Vital Information. I started teaching at the Bass Collective, which was an amazing faculty at the time because John Patitucci was the head. My first album session was with Buddy Williams and Jeff Golub, both of whom were very encouraging and complimentary.

Tell us about Planet X.

I was told that the drummer Virgil Donati was looking for a bass player for his band Planet X, over in Los Angeles. I hadn't heard them, but I was told it was really difficult music. I later played with their keyboard player Derek Sherinian on one of his albums, *Mythology* (2004), which also had Allan Holdsworth on it. Planet X's music was very complex, but I was up for it, and flew out to LA. I was pretty fried after the flight, but 90 minutes after I arrived, Virgil picked me up and took me to the audition. I'd been woodshedding the music, and it was insane, because of all the different note groupings. Still, I passed the audition, because I'd done my homework, and

Virgil and Derek went out of the room afterwards—and then they came back in and said, 'Okay, you're in. Welcome to Planet X! We're about to rehearse for nine days, and then we go to Italy and Poland. When can you be here?' I was like, 'I can be here in a week. That's the quickest I can do it'. And that was it—I flew back six days later, with a suitcase and two basses.

How did you get into bass in the first place?

Before I played bass, I was a really bad saxophone player. The staff at my school would bribe me not to practice, literally, because it was torture for them. They could hear it through the wall. Fortunately I found a bass guitar lying on the stage of the school theatre, because the local rock band had been rehearsing there—I think it was an SG-type bass, in cherry red. I remember it wasn't plugged in, but you know, the acoustic, metallic sound of the strings was very beguiling. I love the saxophone, but it doesn't come to me naturally, and I felt an affinity with the bass. I knew instantly that it was for me, and within about two months, I was so much better at bass than I was on the saxophone.

Who were the bass players that you admired back then?

For me, it was Level 42. The first time I heard 'The Chinese Way' on the radio, I couldn't believe someone could play bass that fast in a pop song. The bass was very prominent, and it was just bewildering. I couldn't even begin to figure it out—it was unbelievable. After that, I was into Japan, so I got into *Tin Drum* and *Gentlemen Take Polaroids* and Mick Karn's bass playing. I really admired Laurence Cottle, too.



“Before bass I was a bad saxophone player. The staff at my school bribed me not to practice!”

You played a Wal from a young age.

I got that bass when I was 18. I went to see Mahavishnu Orchestra play in London in 1984, and Jonas Hellborg was playing with them. I met Jonas at a bass event a couple of years later, and [Wal Basses founder] Ian Waller was there too. I got to play Jonas's double-neck Wal there, and it was the start of my love for those basses.

What other basses have you played?

Well, my very first bass was a Burns Nu-Sonic, and then I had an active Westone Thunder I. The Burns had a tiny short scale, which was good at first, because as a kid, I had small hands, and it was very easy to get around—but obviously it sounded

horrendous. The first double-octave neck bass I had was an Ibanez Roadstar II active in tobacco sunburst, with a maple board and a big headstock, almost like

an old Ken Smith. That was a great bass. Ibanez endorsed me when I was with Planet X, actually—they built me a fretless five-string. I still have it. It looks like the Gary Willis bass, but with nicer wood—mine has a burl maple top and a Nordstrand passive pickup. It's an epoxy coated macassar ebony board—I spec'ed the whole thing out. After that I played Ken Smiths, and these days I play my Wal, Moollon and Xotic basses. I also use Trickfish amps and LaBella strings.

Name a bass part that you're proud of.

The Planet X record that I played on, *Quantum* (2007) definitely has a couple of cool tracks, and the album I did with [Tribal Tech drummer] Kirk Covington, *Starship Cadillac*, is available for download from my website too. That album is fun. It's like Tribal Tech meets Weather Report meets electronica. There's a lot of fretless on that album. That would be a neat thing to hear.

People can buy video and PDF lessons from your website, correct?

Yes. You can also contact me there for one-to-one lessons on Skype or Zoom.

What's your happiest musical memory?

Meeting Allan Holdsworth is one. I saw him play at the Baked Potato in Studio City before he died. We had both been on the Sherinian record, and a friend of mine said to him, 'Oh, Alan, do you know Rufus? You guys are on a track together'. Alan looks at me and he goes, 'Oh yes. A lot of notes... but all the good ones!' That was the best quote ever. ■

Info: www.rufusphilpot.com, Insta @rufusbass.

PACKED HOUSE

Sometime Brand X bassist and fusion master
Percy Jones returns with a new album
and band, PAKT. Read and learn...

Photography: Avraham Bank, Getty

There are supergroups, and then there is PAKT, named after fretless bassist Percy Jones, guitarists Alex Skolnick and Tim Motzer, and drummer Kenny Grohowski. It's a unique line-up, and fortunately their new, self-titled album lives up to its promise.

Jones, a long-time member of fusion band Brand X—famously, once the home of drummer Phil Collins (see pic below)—until his departure in 2020, is on stunning form: As a reminder of why he's been in demand with Suzanne Vega, Brian Eno, and many other musicians over the years, the new album serves an important purpose.

We asked him about the genesis, no pun intended, of the two-hour, improvised recording session, as well as for an update on the situation with Brand X.

How has the pandemic treated you, Percy?

I was in the same boat as almost everybody else: Tours and gigs were cancelled or postponed, with nobody really knowing when or if everything would ever return to normal. It was actually the perfect time to sit down and do some writing, which is what I did. I had been somewhat overdue for some new stuff, so it felt good to get a few new tunes worked out and finished. I also did a bit of recording here at home, a track for Richard Barbieri and four tracks for Mark Wingfield. I also kept practicing to stay in shape: It was a good opportunity to work on the weaker aspects of my technique.

It sounds like it. At least the PAKT album is tremendous. We're really enjoying it.

Oh, good. Thank you. That was recorded last August—actually, on my wife's birthday. I'd played with Kenny in Brand X, so we had a musical rapport going on, but I'd never played with Alex and Tim before, so at the time, I didn't know if it was all gonna shake out. But yeah, it went pretty well.

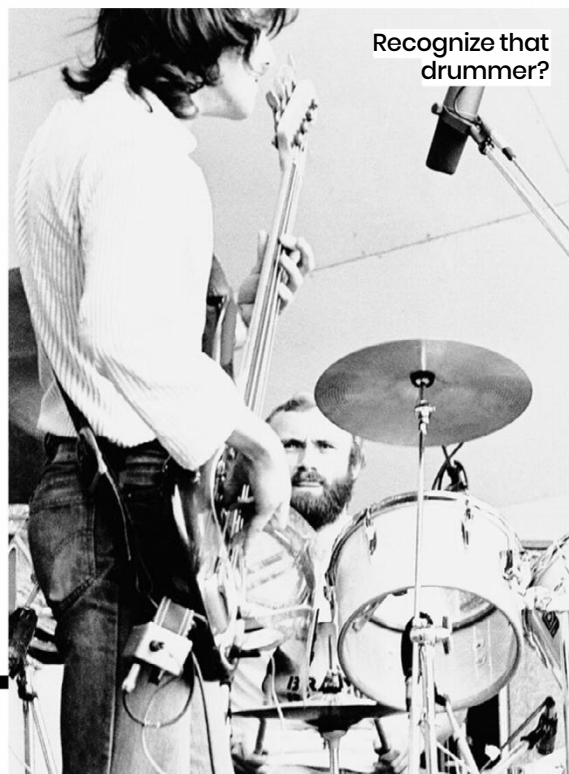
Is not having played with people before beneficial, because they're a blank page, as it were?

That's a good question. I don't know the answer to that. Maybe the music wouldn't have turned out as interesting. We were responding to improv, so nobody knew what was coming next. Those guys are good listeners, though, which makes a huge difference, you know. Nobody was afraid to stop playing—to just shut up and let another guy speak, musically, for a few minutes.

Was it all completely improvised?

Well, we did a soundcheck and played for about a half an hour before they started recording and streaming. By the end of the soundcheck, it was already starting to shape up. In fact, I lost track of what was going on—I thought, 'Maybe they're recording it now', but they hadn't actually started it. It was

“To have the ability to improvise, you have to be a good listener and pay attention to others”



a nice evening. Sometimes, projects like this can go really badly.

There's always an element of risk, presumably.

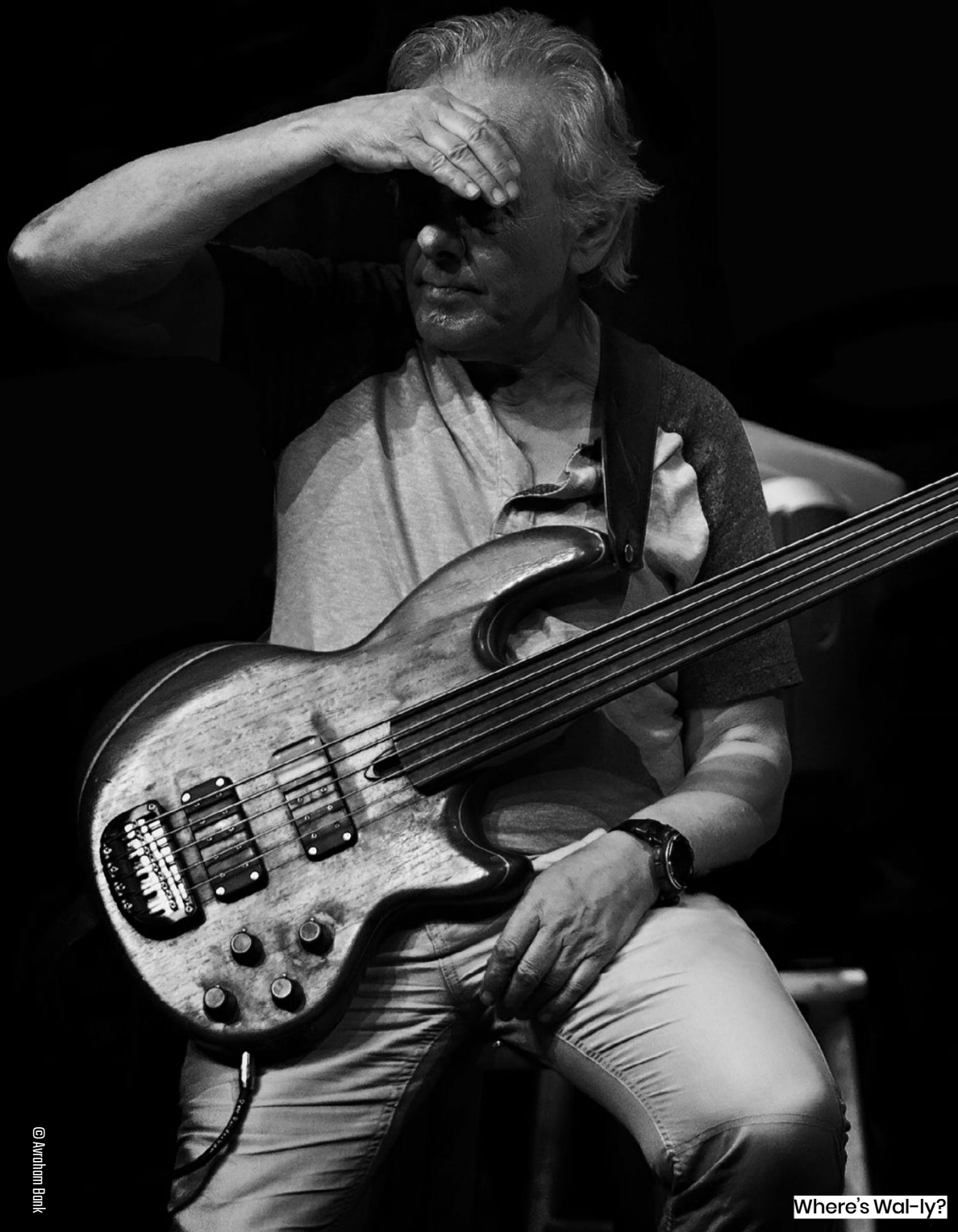
Oh, yeah. I mean, I've done similar gigs, and it's been a car crash. It doesn't always go well. You have to have the ability to improvise, and not everybody can do that. You also have to be a good listener—you have to really pay attention to what the other guys are doing. As a bass player, historically, I've always tried to support the other guys in the band that I'm in. If there's a guy soloing, I'll try and support him. I'll try and lock in with what the drummer is doing and help it all to make sense. If you've done it long enough, it becomes second nature—but stuff can still go wrong.

Which bass were you were using to record?

I've been using an Ibanez five-string for the past few years. It's interesting—there's no magnetic pickup on it, which takes a bit of getting used to because it's very dynamic, and very sensitive to how hard you pull, like an upright in that respect. You have to be careful with the EQ, because the piezo pickup is sensitive to the acceleration of the string rather than the velocity, and the output tends to go up with the frequency. You have to be careful that you don't have too much high mids or high end, because then you start sounding like you're typing—but if you get it right, it's a pretty nice sound, I think.

You also play a Wal.

Yes, although I've used the Ibanez pretty much 100 percent of the time for the last 10 years. Just recently, when I started doing the PAKT stuff, I switched back to the Wal. I just like to try different approaches and develop new ideas. I try not to stay with a static approach to everything. I also have a Wal four-string here, which I haven't actually played for years and years, because when I



switched to the five-string bass, I didn't go back afterwards.

You've said before that you wouldn't want to play a six-string bass.

Well, you know, I have enough trouble with five. I wouldn't be able to handle six. The reason for going to a five was that I wanted to go lower. I have no desire to get higher in pitch—I can use harmonics to get the really high stuff going. I'm not against six-string basses—Anthony Jackson is fantastic—but for me, personally, five-string is the best way to go.

You made a permanent switch to fretless bass in 1974. Who else was playing fretless back then?

I can't think of anybody that I knew, personally, who was playing a fretless. It was a bit of a rarity back then. Even though I always played electric bass, and I started on a fretted bass, I mostly listened to upright players for inspiration. The biggest one was probably Charles Mingus. There were a few that I looked up to and listened to, but he was my favorite.

What was your first fretless bass?

Brand X was just getting going, and I got my first publishing advance, which was the sum of £200. I remember reading the *Melody Maker* that week, and in the back there was a guy who was selling a Fender Precision fretless for £200. I went up to North London to his house and took a look at it, and it was in really good nick, apart from some Guinness beer stains on it, so I gave him the money and took the bass home, not knowing if I'd be able to master it or not.

How long did it take to feel comfortable with fretless?

Almost right away, although I wouldn't say it was comfortable, because my intonation needed work, and I needed to master a little bit of technique, but I related to it right away, and I could express myself in a way that I couldn't do on a fretted. At the time, we were only six weeks from recording our first studio album *Unorthodox Behaviour* in 1975, although the album didn't come out until 1976, so I made a real determination to try and nail the bass well enough to play it on the record, which I did. I still had some

intonation issues going on, but it wasn't too bad. I never went back to playing fretted bass after that point.

You do a lot of three-finger picking. Was that your innovation?

Possibly, yes. I started out very intuitively, playing an arpeggiated chord with three fingers as if it was a major or minor triad, or I-VII-III. I wasn't even thinking about it in detail—I would intuitively do it—but then one day, I thought I'd better sit down and figure out exactly what I was doing and try and get a handle on it. I analyzed what I was doing with my plucking hand, and my logic was that my second finger is the longest finger, so I would try and use that when going up the fingerboard, because it obviously had the extra reach, which was useful. I came up with all these different fingerings. Say there were two notes on the A string, and the next note was up on the D string, I'd go 1, 3, 2, and descending, I'd do that with two fingers, just alternating. For me, it just makes playing easier.

You left Brand X last year after 46 years in the band. What happened there?

I didn't actually leave the band: I stopped working with their management at the end of 2019. I simply refuse to work with anybody who is not transparent and accountable. I still consider myself an owner of Brand X, along with [the band's guitarist] John Goodsall.

So PAKT is your main current live and studio project?

Yes, at the moment it is. We recorded the album in the middle of the pandemic, masked up and socially distanced, with no audience. That made it all a bit weird and unusual, but as I said, it all worked out rather well. We recently did a few gigs that went well too. I still have my other band MJ12 too, which I enjoy a lot. That's been inactive during the pandemic, but we have gigs to play in October, so I'm really looking forward to playing with those guys again.

Would you say that you feel optimistic about the future, Percy?

Yes, I am. I moved on from Brand X and into trying out new ideas with new people, and I actually feel quite liberated. Playing with new people is always an introduction to new ideas along with new challenges, so the learning process continues. I have to say thanks to all the people who listened to and supported Brand X over the decades, and hope they like PAKT's new music, as well as the music to come. ■



LEGENDARY LOWS

Nick Wass explores the history of Sir Paul McCartney and his legendary Höfner 500/1 basses

Has there ever been a musician as closely associated with an instrument as Paul McCartney and his Höfner bass? You see a picture of McCartney, and you aren't at all surprised to see him holding the Höfner... it's almost as if he was born with it.

All the Beatles have been put under the microscope again and again over the years. Their lives have been examined in the most detailed way for books, magazine articles, movies, and now, of course, for social media and the internet. This scrutiny has included, on countless occasions, McCartney and his Höfner basses. From this has come numerous legends and myths, many of which are now copied and stated as facts simply because they have been around for years.

For this article, I thought we might try to look at what we know as actual facts, and add to those a little of what we might reasonably suppose to have occurred in the past. I will only include the four Höfner basses that I know McCartney has played in public. He owns several others, but they are in his private collection and as such, I believe it is his business to discuss them, not mine.

The four basses are:

1 The one he purchased in Hamburg in 1961—the '61 bass'.



2 The bass he acquired in the autumn of 1963—the '63 bass'.

3 The 'Jubilee' bass given to him by Höfner to play at the Queen's Jubilee concert in 2012.

4 The 1967 bass he acquired and used for a private concert in 2016—the '67 bass'.

THE '61 BASS

Never has there been so much mystery surrounding a guitar as McCartney's 1961 Höfner bass. In April 1961, the Beatles returned to Hamburg for a second time to

take up a residency at the Top Ten Club from April 1 to July 1. The line-up was John Lennon and George Harrison on guitar, McCartney on piano and guitar, Stuart Sutcliffe on bass, and Pete Best on drums. Sutcliffe soon announced his intention of leaving, as he wanted to study at the University of Fine Art in Hamburg. The band soon 'elected' McCartney to take over the bass. The problem now, for McCartney, was to get his own bass. It is also a problem for us because all the myths, legends, and ideas about what happened next now appear.

What do we know as facts? From interviews given by McCartney and from a statement from the sales assistant in the shop where he purchased his first Höfner, it would appear to be as follows.

McCartney took himself off to a large and prestigious music shop, spread over five floors, called Steinway Musikhaus, located at Collonaden 29 in Hamburg, not too far from the Reeperbahn area. Steinway were and still are a premier manufacturer of pianos and, in those days, also had shops. They were a top Höfner dealer, and so knew the product well.

McCartney must have gone up to the fourth floor, as this was where guitars and drums were located. In his own words, he says that he saw a bass guitar with a symmetrical body shape, and thought he might play it upside

down and not look stupid. It was also at a price point he could afford. In an interview for *Guitarist Magazine* in September 1993, he is quoted as saying: “I got my violin bass at the Steinway shop in the town center. I remember going along and there was this bass that was quite cheap...”

Of course, McCartney must have asked the shop assistant, Günter Höper, about buying the bass. During the discussion, Höper realized that McCartney was a left-hander, and so offered to order a left-handed bass. As we know, Steinway was a main dealer for Höfner and would easily have contacted the factory to arrange this.

I want to bury a couple of myths here that have been around for far too long.

1 McCartney purchased a right-handed bass and converted it to a left-handed bass. This simply isn't possible without putting a whole new top onto the bass.

2 Steinway had a left-handed bass in stock and so sold him that one. There are no records or evidence that Höfner had ever built a 500/1 bass left-handed before the one for McCartney was ordered. Their catalogs and price list didn't include one. No photograph of one has ever surfaced, and nobody has ever claimed to have owned one. How likely is it that Höfner suddenly and speculatively decided to build a left-handed 500/1, that Steinway just happened to take delivery of it, and then McCartney just happened to walk in?

McCartney would now use this bass until October 1963, playing hundreds of gigs and making numerous recordings. The Beatles' first two albums were recorded with this bass, as were all of their singles up to and including 'She Loves You'. It certainly worked hard! By the summer of 1963, it was starting to need some repairs, which is not surprising when you consider just how much it had been used, thrown into vans, and

generally moved around. The neck pickup frame had broken, and was held together with black tape, a fix made, perhaps, by roadie Mal

Evans to keep the bass playing. At some point in the summer of 1963, a replacement bass was ordered and delivered to McCartney in October. The '61 would then become his backup bass.

In the spring of 1964, the '61 bass was sent off to Sound City for an overhaul and repairs, although it is not known who decided to do this, nor precisely what they requested should be done. Whatever, the bass was significantly altered. It was completely resprayed, possibly by Burns, in a three-part dark sunburst poly finish; the two pickups were mounted in

From 1961 to 1963, McCartney would use the '61 bass for hundreds of gigs and numerous recordings

a single large (presumably) wooden housing, and the original 'tea-cup' knobs were replaced with what seem to be knobs from a radio. Why such drastic action was taken is not known, as all it really required was a general overhaul, the broken pickup frame replaced and a thorough clean.

It would now be used as the backup bass and can be seen in several photographs, propped by the side of the stage, as the Beatles continued to tour. McCartney may have played it live once when a string broke on his '63 bass, but it is assumed not to have

been used on any further recordings until 1968. It was used by McCartney that year for the film of the song 'Revolution' and is possibly the bass heard on the track on the 'White Album', though his Rickenbacker 4001 was probably used on the single version.

In January 1969, the Beatles began filming at Twickenham Studios for the *Get Back/Let It Be* sessions. The '61 and the '63 basses are evident in the film, with McCartney using both; however, it is doubtful that the '61 was used to record the songs that finished up on the *Let It Be* album. Filming was moved to the

basement of Apple HQ in London on January 21st, but the '61 bass is not seen here.

At some time after the sessions, the '61 bass disappeared, presumably stolen. It has not been seen since. The problem here is that nobody has ever clearly established where the bass was stored after the sessions, let alone what actually happened to it.

Numerous theories and false sightings have occurred over the years, but no-one has ever found the lost bass. I'll give just two possibilities as to what happened, but that is all they can be—possibilities.

1 It was stored at Abbey Road Studios in the lockup that the Beatles used, and stolen.

2 It was stored in the basement at Apple HQ following the *Let It Be* sessions, and subsequently stolen from there. I have had a lot of correspondence with someone who worked for Apple at the HQ during the early Seventies. He wrote that there was definitely Beatles gear in the basement. The situation at Apple was totally chaotic, with many people, some unknown, coming and going daily. He said it was like a continuous 24-hour party at times. He knew that one or more of Harrison's guitars went missing from the basement. Did the '61 bass also disappear from there?

I would lean towards the second version from above. Still, nobody has ever come up



"I remember, there was this bass that was quite cheap..."

David Redfern/Redferns/Betty

with definite and solid information. Hence, it is likely, and sadly, forever to remain a mystery as to what happened to the '61.

THE '63 BASS

At some unknown date in 1963, though probably around June, someone ordered a new 500/1 bass for McCartney. Who did this and how they did it are unknown, and no records survive to tell us. It is likely that Selmer—the UK distributor for Höfner—was asked about it, and they ordered it from the Höfner factory. Selmer was well known then, and had a large shop on the Charing Cross Road in London.

Whatever the circumstances, Höfner produced a left-handed bass, only the second one ever made after the '61, and sent this over to England. Höfner had uprated the 500/1

model somewhat since McCartney purchased the '61, so his new bass reflected these changes. The bass now had an arched back, strip tuners, a two-piece neck, and a new headstock logo, and the middle pickup was moved down near to the bridge. It now used type 511 'Staple' humbucking pickups.

McCartney was first seen using his new bass on the British television programme *Ready, Steady, Go* on October 4 1963, likely the day he received it. For the rehearsal, he used the '61 bass. He would now use the '63 bass exclusively for all live, film, and television performances up until the Beatles stopped touring after their final concert at Candlestick Park, San Francisco on August 29, 1966. He would also use it on all records until he got his Rickenbacker 4001 in 1965, which he used

McCartney could have any bass in the world, but he opts to play the 'cheap' one he has had since 1963

for almost all most recordings thereafter.

The '63 bass was last used with the Beatles for a live performance at the famous rooftop concert on January 30 1969. It was sporting a BASSMAN sticker and had over-long Rotosound strings on it. Following this it was put away for a long time, only making rare appearances until 1987 when McCartney was recording the *Flowers In The Dirt* album. Elvis Costello was very involved with the recording of this album, and it was he who suggested McCartney should get the Höfner out again.

McCartney said, '[It was] unusual because I had sort of parked it. I had thought I had

outgrown it. I started playing it again and never really looked back. It's great that Elvis encouraged me to take it out.' After this, he never really used any other bass for live

performances and for many recordings. It was, as Costello had remarked, the bass everyone expected to see McCartney with.

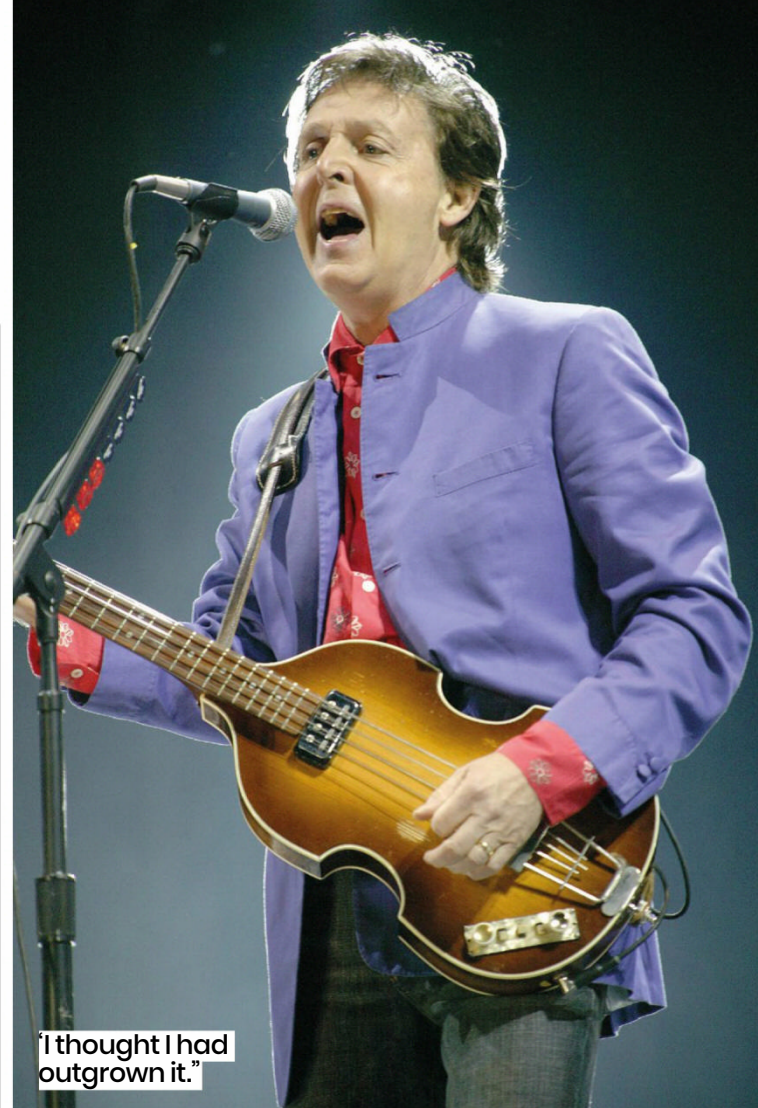
Today, McCartney continues to perform and record with the '63 Höfner, despite some believing it must be an exact copy that they see. I can assure you isn't, as I'm one of the few people who has done work on this bass. Now nearly 60 years old, it has endured well, with only some routine maintenance and minor repairs. The '63 bass is known as #1 by McCartney and his crew.

THE JUBILEE BASS

A concert was organized as part of the celebrations for Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee on July 4, 2012. This was held on a stage at the end of the Mall in front of Buckingham Palace, with McCartney as the headline act.

As a speculative venture, Höfner had two 500/1 basses sprayed in the USA by Kevin Jennings with the Union Jack emblem on the top. The red and blue were sprayed on, but the Union Jack's white element was represented by the natural wood. The back, sides, and neck were left in the natural wood, and a top coat of clear gloss was applied overall. The two basses were not built specially for this, but were simply stock basses of the v62 'Mersey' model. Standard parts were then used to finish the basses. All of this was done only a short time before the concert.

One bass was then sent directly to McCartney just days before the concert, as a surprise for him, since Höfner had not told him they were building it. The other bass was kept by Höfner, who still have it, though it has occasionally been loaned out for exhibitions. McCartney began the concert playing his trusty '63 bass, but for his last song, 'Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da', he switched to the new Jubilee



bass. After the concert, he was photographed next to the Queen, holding the Jubilee bass.

THE '67 BASS

On August 30, 2016, at Jimmy Buffett's house in Sagaponack, Sag Harbor, Hilary Clinton held a ticket-only event as part of her fundraising for the forthcoming Presidential election, for which she was a candidate. The event included performances from Jimmy Buffett, Jon Bon Jovi, and Paul McCartney. Macca's numbers included 'Can't Buy Me Love', 'Lady Madonna' and concluded with 'Hey Jude'.

The problem for McCartney was that he didn't have a bass guitar with him. Fortunately, his crew were able to locate a left-handed 1967 500/1 for the Clinton event. He liked the bass so much so that he purchased it as a backup bass when touring. It served in this role until 2018, when it was replaced by a unique handmade 500/1, built explicitly as the backup. McCartney retains the '67 bass in his collection. It has recently been away for an overhaul and a neck reset.

It's tough to write an article like this and not leave out many facts and figures, especially when writing about the most famous musician in the world. I haven't dwelled very much on each bass's technical details, simply because much of this information is already out there on the internet. The magic is simply McCartney and his little Höfner, not what plectrum he uses or the strings that are fitted. This guy could have any bass in the world—but he opts to play the 'cheap' one he has had since 1963. ■

With thanks to Chris Dekker, Clement Cachot-Coulom, Keith Smith, and Klaus Voormann.



Rob Verhorst/Redferns/Getty

Mick Hutson/Redferns/Getty



HILL CLIMB

Brandon Hill of Unto Others recounts his journey towards bass righteousness

My first real band started around 2002 or 2003 when I was a freshman in high school. We would walk from school to my buddy Paul's house every day to write weird songs and rip off the Misfits. His dad had a bunch of rad vintage guitars, including an SG-style bass, so I spent hundreds of hours messing around with those—thank you, Eric.

As a kid I always wanted to be a drummer, but that was way too loud for the neighbors, and way too expensive. I was able to get an acoustic guitar when I was about 12 years old, and from then on I've just always wanted to

play everything. The first band I started as a bassist was short-lived—I think Skald played one show in Portland—and that was pretty much my entire bass-playing career for over a decade until I joined Unto Others, called Idle Hands at the time. I didn't know the guys super well at that point, but my name came up when they were searching for a bassist, and I made myself available. I was already a fan of the debut EP, which had come out about six months earlier.

“There are photos of us playing from back in the day where I'd have no idea whose gear I was using”

I don't think I ever technically owned a bass until I bought this funny Eighties Synsonics headless from a Craigslist ad maybe five years ago. It doesn't sound good, but it's fun to play and looks ridiculous, I love it. I originally got it to use it as a MIDI controller for my synths. Even when I eventually started playing bass in a band, I would always just borrow someone's—there are photos of us playing from back then, 2005 I'd say, and I have no idea whose gear it is I'm using. I was a broke teenager living on random floors at the time, so that's how it usually went. Owning stuff is way more convenient.

I got a Jackson JS32 for the first Unto Others tour. Those things sound just fine, and they're cheap, which is totally cool with me—running around with really valuable stuff stresses me out. So many bands end up with their van windows smashed out and their irreplaceable gear stolen, so that thing was great for the circumstances. At that time I wasn't technically an official band member yet. I think it was actually near the end of that tour in San Francisco when I found the midnight P-Bass that I use all the time now. It was black with gold hardware and sounded cool, so it checked all the boxes.

I'm not really a gear-obsessed person—I just want to plug shit in and play. P-Basses always sound awesome to me without much tweaking, they're bright and punchy. I've used that bass on every tour since, as well as on our album *Strength*. Most recently I got an old Hagstrom Swede bass from a guy in Portland, which is what I used for the 'When Will God's Work Be Done' video. That thing's a heavy Seventies beast and definitely sounds like one.

I use an Ampeg SVT-7 Pro amp with an Ampeg 8x10 fridge cab. As far as pedals go, it's a Korg Pitchblack tuner, and a Seymour Duncan Studio Bass compressor. I had a ton of interference issues with my wireless system on the 2019 King Diamond/Uncle Acid tour, so I decided to upgrade to a Shure GLX-D14 before the ill-fated Decibel tour that got cancelled in March 2020... along with everything else in the world.

There are a ton of awesome bassists I admire, but if you're making me pick one it's absolutely gonna be Geezer Butler. He was in the best heavy metal band of all time, in which he wrote some of the most badass and memorable bass-lines ever, as well as a ton of interesting, dark, fantastical lyrics. The

guy just rules, and seems very friendly and unpretentious on top of all that. ■

Strength is out now.

Info: www.untoothers.us





FLO STATE

Flo Moore is an up-and-coming jazz bass aficionado: Watch out for her

Interview Ellen O'Reilly

There aren't too many female jazz bassists on the London session scene, so when I heard Flo Moore play I was immediately awe-struck. Her sense of groove and soloing expertise stood out on a jam night in a sweaty club in South London. Flo is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, and has performed with many established artists, such as Jason Rebello, Judi Jackson, and Pete King, and has played the Royal Albert Hall and the North Sea Jazz Festival, as well as recording on tracks featuring Frank Gambale and working with the Grammy-winning producer Jason Miles.

"I started playing bass aged nine in my primary school jazz band," she tells us. "I was very lucky to grow up at a time when there were a lot of great musicians coming through my local music scene, so I played in several youth bands." She has all the right influences for a jazzer too, adding: "Jaco would probably be my biggest influence, and I also look up to contemporary players like Hadrien Feraud and Dane Alderson. My other favorite players include James Jamerson, Pino Palladino, Rocco Prestia, John Patitucci, Jimmy Johnson, Paul Jackson, Victor Bailey, Alphonso Johnson, and Gary Willis."

Flo wields a pretty impressive axe, she reveals. "I've been playing a Mayones BE Exotic five-string bass with MEC pickups and D'Addario strings for the last few years, which I absolutely love, and I use a Markbass Little Mark Tube amp head and a Barefaced Super Midget 1x12 cab. This setup is great in most settings and particularly good for that fusion 'Jaco' sound! If I'm playing in a situation that requires more of a classic funk tone, I usually revert to my four-string Fender Jazz bass with half-wound strings, which instantly emulates the likes of Paul Jackson or George Porter Jr. I sometimes use a pedalboard with a few favorites, like the Electro-Harmonix Pitchfork and an MXR envelope filter, but I haven't delved too far into the world of pedals

yet—I'm equally happy just plugging straight into the amp."

I was so blown away by Flo's playing that I practically interrogated her on her practice regime. As she says, "I tend to just start improvising over a tune until something comes out that I need to work on. It normally only takes about 30 seconds! I enjoy transcribing as well, and spend a lot of time taking down my favorite bass-lines and solos. I also find if I'm listening to music regularly away from the instrument, I'm more inspired when it comes to sitting down and practicing."

For most of us pro bass players, the lockdown was a real shock to the system with tours and gigs dropping like flies. How did Flo get through it? "I managed to stay relatively active, which was positive. I had some online lessons with Hadrien Feraud and Evan Marien, and started to focus more on social media by sharing some 'lockdown' videos and collaborations on my YouTube and Instagram channels. I was also very fortunate to be involved in some online livestreams with the jazz collective Kansas Smitty's, where we performed tributes to classic jazz fusion albums, so I was able to keep playing live with people, which was amazing—and it also gave me the motivation to keep practicing."

What's next for this budding jazz starlet? "I'm looking forward to going into the studio with the saxophonist Paul Booth to do a double quartet album, as well as some early autumn gigs to promote keyboardist Benjamin Croft's latest album, which features several legends from the USA including Frank Gambale, Chad Wackerman, and Randy Brecker. With regards to my own projects, I have started to move into band-leading and composing, and I'll be recording an album within the next year."

We at *Bass Player* will certainly keep an ear out for that. Flo is definitely a bassist to watch. ■

Info: www.flomoore.com

"For practice, I tend to just start improvising over a tune until something comes out that I need to work on"





STILL ALIVE AND KICKIN’

Billy Sheehan looks back three decades at his band Mr. Big’s defining statement, *Lean Into It*—and its unexpected hit song for the ages

Interview: Mike Brooks Photography: Getty

For those of us of a particular vintage, 2021 marks the 30th anniversary of the release of several influential rock albums—*Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, *Use*

Your Illusion I and II, *Nevermind*, *Ten*, and Metallica’s ‘Black Album’ among them. Many of these albums landed within a few months of each other, raising the question:

Will we ever see such a concentration of influential (and loud) music in such a compressed timeframe again?

Among the many essential releases that year was Mr. Big’s second album, *Lean Into It*. This was an album of surprises, not least because it contained a platinum-coated worldwide hit. Yet that song almost didn’t

progress beyond the writing stage—and was eventually placed at the end of the album, drawing parallels in that sense with Toto’s ‘Africa’.

As bassist Billy Sheehan recalls, no-one expected ‘To Be With You’ to be a monster hit. “Eric [Martin, vocals] sent us a cassette of songs that he’d been working on,” he tells us “and at the very end was this little piece on

piano, ‘To Be With You’. Pat [Torpey, drums], Paul [Gilbert, guitar] and I said ‘We gotta do it—it’s the perfect ‘roll the credits at the end of the movie’ singalong’. And at first,

Eric was reluctant, but we put it on there, and he sang it beautifully. If we’d known that song would be a hit, we’d have put it first and released it as the lead single.”

**“If we’d have known that
‘To Be With You’ would be
a hit, we’d have released
it as the lead single”**

Lean Into It went on to become Mr. Big's biggest-selling album, but it was assembled largely by instinct, Sheehan adds. "We went into a room together and started exchanging ideas. Paul was tuning his guitar at one point, and I said 'What key is that in?' It was the key of G, so I added the bass notes underneath it and that became the song 'Alive And Kickin'". We put it together, sent it up to Eric, and he did his lyrics."

Gilbert, a guitarist of phenomenal skill and speed, had become known for a trick with an electric drill that he performed live, using the device to 'play' his guitar. "We'd done the drill thing live," remembers Sheehan, "so we said, 'Why don't we put it on the record?' and used it on 'Daddy, Brother, Lover, Little Boy'. I remember being at the Rainbow Bar & Grill on Sunset

"Pearl Jam had the hot record in America, but in Japan we outsold them 40 to one"

Strip, and I wrote ideas for the lyrics of that song on napkins."

All of this was taking place as the first alternative rock and grunge bands were on their way up—but the winds of change hadn't yet started to blow, he says. "Even though grunge was coming out, in the USA it didn't come out as much or as quickly as the rest of the world, although it did catch up eventually. Pearl Jam had the hot record in America, but in Japan, we outsold Pearl Jam by 40 to one—it just didn't catch on culturally over there."

The album artwork came about through a twist of fate, it turns out. "We went out to

a restaurant for the big reveal to see the artwork photo—and it was just awful!" says Sheehan. "It featured a girl wearing a Fifties bathing suit, wearing

shoes with a short heel that a nurse would wear. We're looking at it and saying, 'What in the world is this? Anything will be better than this!' On the wall was the photo of the train wreck, so I said 'That would be better'. We ended up using that."

The title of the record came from a slightly bleak in-band joke, he adds. "A fighter jet crashed at an air show, and an engine from the jet came roaring into the crowd. When we saw it on the news, Pat said to me, 'What do you do if you're in the crowd and you see 10 tons of flaming, fuel-encrusted jet engine heading right towards your face?', and I replied 'Lean into it. You ain't gonna make it, so you might as well!'"

The success of the album and the 'To Be With You' single—the latter a Number One hit—changed the course of Mr. Big's career, a point not wasted on Sheehan. "I was very lucky. I'd seen the success of the *Eat 'Em And Smile* band [with singer Dave Lee Roth] and I wanted to see that level of success with a band I'd put together," he muses. "It changed so many things in my life and for the first time, this was my success—I put the band together. It's me, Pat, Eric and Paul's success; we made it happen. It was not only a life-changer, but a life-completer."

"Finally, you know that the things you were doing have worth and value," he concludes. "The fact it was our own thing lays to rest a lot of self-doubt, which we all have, and I still have, of course... but not quite as much! It really helped to move that aside for a while—and to take an honest look at whether or not our decisions were the right ones."

***Mr Big's Lean Into It (30th Anniversary Edition)* is out now.**

Info: www.mrbigsite.com

"I wanted to see that success with a band that I'd put together."



© Paul Minkin/Getty Images



Mr Big in 1991 (from left): Paul Gilbert, Eric Martin, Pat Torpey (RIP), Billy Sheehan.

Still Lean

Lean Into It, recalled track by track

'Daddy, Brother, Lover, Little Boy'

"This is just a big, raucous way to start off the record. Most tours we open with that song because people love it." Was the cordless drill stunt a dig at the speed-merchant guitar players of the time? "Yeah, that's the joke—but it turns out that Paul is faster than the drill! It was meant as a tongue-in-cheek joke, but then after that, everyone was thinking, 'Well, we'll get an egg-beater or a chainsaw...'"

'Alive And Kickin'

"The song itself told a really sweet story, with two kids getting in a car and taking off—'Let's go, let's start this adventure of life.' It's another crowd-pleaser! All the songs at one point or another could have been singles."

'Green-Tinted Sixties Mind'

"I think there's some Beach Boys influence there from Paul. At the time he was heavily into Brian Wilson and

the Beach Boys, and some of their chord voicings and the way they did things with harmonies. There's some interesting content in that song: We were very lucky in Mr. Big to have decided to sing a lot and use harmony."

'CDFS—Lucky This Time'

"Compact discs had just come out, and that sound of being fast-forwarded was intriguing, so what are you going to call it? Everything's detuned for that song, so it sounded super-heavy and I love it."

'Voodoo Kiss'

"Pat was brilliant at that shuffle. He separated the men from the boys with that groove: He could do that triplet feel and make it convincing and get the room moving with it. Guys like Jeff Porcaro mastered that, but some noteworthy drummers have a real tough time with shuffle and swing."

'Never Say Never'

"It's possible that we never played this song live. It was really high in pitch for the vocals. There was a weird situation with the record

label because of the 'Long goodbye... yeah!' line. On the demo, the 'Yeah!' was in a different spot, so we had to go back in and recut it at our expense to get it where they wanted it—and then they didn't bother releasing it as a single!"

'Just Take My Heart'

"To Be With You' was still hot, it was still Top 10 all over the country—so you'd let it cool down and go away before you release the next song, right? No, the label got greedy and wanted to release this single before 'To Be With You' was gone. I honestly believe we could have had another Number One hit with this song, but the label blew it!"

'My Kinda Woman'

"This might have been written around the time of the first record [*Mr Big*, 1989]; I loved the vocal performance on this one, it's just spectacular."

'A Little Too Loose'

"A little tongue in cheek? Yeah, just a bit... we had adventures on that first tour. I was very lucky, I'd done a lot of touring before Mr. Big, with UFO in Europe, and the *Eat 'Em And Smile* band, and also my

former band Talas had toured all over the country. For some band members, it was their first time being out in that situation—so there were many adventures, some sung and some unsung!"

'Road To Ruin'

"That triplet feel in there—1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3—it's rare now to hear threes and sixes. To jam and play in 3/4 is something I really gravitate towards. Again, the vocals and harmonies were great—on the last few tours, we did several songs that were very much based on harmonies, and I'm so pleased that we could do that."

'To Be With You'

"I wish everyone could have a hit record, because it changed all of our lives incredibly, and the label was very pleased. I would see girls in the audience who'd come to hear 'To Be With You', alongside guys in Slayer and Metallica shirts who'd come to see Paul and I do our thing. The girls were pumping their fists through the heavy stuff and the guys were singing 'To Be With You', so it was a great way to break down the barriers." ■



P R O - M O D

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GEAR Reviews

Welcome to our expert road-tests of state-of-the-art bass gear

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

Reviewed this month...

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METROLINE VJ5
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PURPLE CRUSH 50 COMBO
\$299, www.orangeamps.com

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NORDSTRAND
STARLIFTER
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FENDER

Player Plus Jazz

FENDER
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A new J for a new generation, you say? The Editor warms up his thumb

Fender don't need to prove anything to us, now or ever. Any informed bass player understands the brand's heritage and appreciates the value of a decent Precision or Jazz in his or her arsenal, even though great basses are also made by many, many other manufacturers.

The question in 2021, 70 years since the Big F started making basses, is how many more Fenders we really need. A quick check of their website reveals that no fewer than 19 Precision and 26 Jazz variants are currently available, not to mention the much-loved Mustang and Jaguar basses, and that doesn't include artist signature models.

Now, yet another new range of Ps and Js—the Player Plus basses—has appeared, as an expansion of the existing, affordable Player range from 2018. Of these, we've been sent the four-string Jazz for review: a Precision and a five-string J are also available. The goal of the original



\$1099

Player series was, I quote, “to set a new standard for what an entry-point Fender could be”, while the objective of the new made-in-Mexico basses is “to match the unique characteristics of today’s players and creators”.

The first goal has been successfully met: These instruments, while not exactly cheap, come in around a thousand dollars or pounds—a reasonable price for instruments of this quality and heritage. As for the second aim, of encouraging today’s young bassists to pick up a Fender, reinforced by the appearance of *BP*’s recent cover star Blu DeTiger in the publicity, let’s see if they’ve pulled it off.

Build Quality

Well, this certainly doesn’t feel like an entry-level bass. For starters, it weighs just under a whopping 10 pounds, and the quality and design of

pretty much all the components is impressive. The hi-mass bridge gives the instrument solidity, and the rolled-off neck edges, which all basses will have after the revolution, give it a lustrous feel.

My personal test for build quality always starts with a quick poke at the pickups: If they’re attached immovably, as these are, I always feel reassured. The familiar tuners move slowly and steadily, the body finish is beautifully smooth and consistent, and the frets feel very smoothly navigable. The only slightly cut-price components are the plastic control pots, but you can’t have everything. As the great Ronnie Scott pointed out, where would you put it?

Sounds And Playability

We have 18 volts to play with, as per the two handy pop-out battery compartments; one day someone will invent a single 18-volt battery



To a great extent, this is a friendly bass for the young musician

and save us a lot of time. This is good news, because when you plug in and start experimenting with the active EQ, it performs with great muscularity, boosting our tones quickly and powerfully at the three expected points.

Controls are volume, pickup blend—a very useful feature; I much prefer it to separate pickup volumes—and the three-band EQ, toggled on and off by a microswitch. This is split, nostalgically, between an old-school stacked pot for bass and treble, and a single mids pot.

This configuration is highly appropriate in today's era: Whether you're trying to be heard through a minuscule smartphone speaker, or attempting to cut through your guitarist's obnoxious seven-string tuned down to A, a dedicated mids control is not only your friend, it's a life-saver.

As for playability, do we even need to go there? The Fender Jazz is and always has been one of the most player-friendly bass designs on the planet, and this variant doesn't let you down in that sense. Young and/or economically-dimensioned bassists will love the neck and its 41.3mm nut width, and of course the 12"-radius fingerboard and modern C-shaped neck profile have always been popular for a simple reason: They make your fretting easy and fun.

Conclusion

Okay, we'll buy it. If I were 18 years old and making bass videos for YouTube or TikTok, my instrument would need plenty of mids and power, it would need to be reliable, it would need to look good, and it would have to be affordable. The last of these aside, our Player Plus J pulls off a perfect score.

I applaud the thinking that has gone into this range. To a great extent, this is a friendly bass for the young musician: The neck will suit small hands, and the electronics strike me as perfect for today's needs, whether studio or live. It's a heavy instrument, though, and having seen my own athletic-but-slender kids struggle with a 10-pound bass, I wonder whether some reduction in mass might have been beneficial.

As for the cost, can any of today's under-thirties really afford a thousand bucks/quid without applying to the Bank of Mom and Pop? I doubt it, but much cheaper, equally cool basses exist for that very reason. They're just not Fenders. So if the brand is important to you, and you need the beefed-up, glammed-up performance that these excellent Player Plus basses give you, consider the investment. If not, hundreds of other choices are out there, available to you at the click of a mouse or tap of a phone screen. ■

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | \$1099

Made In | Mexico

Body | Alder

Neck | Maple, 34" scale

Neck Join | Bolt-on

Fingerboard | Maple, 20 frets

Pickup | 2 x Player Plus Noiseless
single-coils

Controls | Volume, pickup blend, three-
band active EQ (1 x mids boost/cut pot,
1 x stacked treble/bass boost/cut pot),
active/passive toggle switch

Hardware | Fender tuners, HiMass bridge

Weight | 9.9 lbs

Left-hand option available | Yes

Case/gigbag included | Deluxe gigbag

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Neck dimensions, tones, build quality

Minus | A tad heavy, and costly, for
young bassists

Overall | A beautiful, amped-up J...
but will the kids go for it?

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY



SOUND QUALITY



VALUE





SADOWSKY

MetroLine VJ5

Self-confessed Sadowsky fanboy Kev Sanders investigates this MetroLine model

FRAMUS WARWICK USA
www.framuswarwickusa.com

\$3670
MAP

As you'll recall, the buzz at Winter NAMM 2020 revolved around the new licensing and distribution tie-up between Sadowsky and Warwick—two of the most respected names in bass, coming together to produce and distribute a new range of European-made Sadowsky basses. How does their VJ5 stack up against the competition?

Build Quality

At first glance, what we have here is another five-string Jazz bass, but appearances can be deceptive. The biggest departure from the J template is the body shape, which is sleeker, smaller, lighter, and even more comfortable to play than the original. Like all Sadowsky basses, in terms of construction there's little here that differs from the traditional tried-and-tested norm, but even a cursory glance reveals Warwick's high standards of production.

The pale satin maple 24-fret neck attaches to the body with an impeccable, air-tight fit, and is secured with four screws set into stainless steel ferrules. There's no sculpting to the heel joint other than a generous radius to the body edges behind the neck pocket, but to a large extent the slim neck, narrow body, and deep cutaway of the lower bout negate the need for this, with access right up to the second octave pretty much unhindered.

There are some neat touches to the hardware, including Warwick's Just-A-Nut III and S-security straplocks. Elsewhere, the lightweight, open tuners, and Sadowsky quick-release bridge are both of high

quality, as befitting a bass of this standard. The black knurled aluminum controls have a smooth, linear action, and removing the rear cover plate reveals neat soldering and high-quality components inside.

Talking of electronics, the MetroLine has a Sadowsky-designed preamp, powered by a single nine-volt battery and activated as soon as the cable is plugged in. The Warwick MEC pots for the bass and treble controls are boost-only, so there's zero boost when the controls are turned all the way down; the push/pull VTC control is a passive mid circuit, with the maximum setting being a flat EQ.

As you turn this control back, the treble components in the signal are gently cut, giving a warm, vintage vibe to the sound. Pull up the VTC and you bypass the preamp altogether, giving you a single passive tone control. Turning the pickup pan control counter-clockwise increases the balance towards the neck pickup, and clockwise to select the bridge pickup. This still catches me out—even on my own bass—but it's an easy enough job to swap two wires on the pot so that it operates in the opposite way.

Sounds And Playability

The most important aspect of Roger Sadowsky's basses is the sound, just as it always has been. Playability and ergonomics are crucial, and looks are very important too, but these are and always have been in the service of a great bass tone. One example of this philosophy is weight. Sadowsky has always gone to great lengths to minimize poundage, originally seeking out the lightest ash for the basses' bodies that he



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | \$3670 MAP
Made In | Germany
Body | Lightweight American swamp ash
Neck | Maple, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on
Nut width | 47.5mm
Fingerboard | Maple
Frets | 24
Pickups | Two passive Sadowsky hum-cancelling soapbars
Electronics | Sadowsky active 9V preamp
Controls | Volume, pickup pan, Vintage Tone Control with push/pull function for preamp bypass, stacked treble and bass (boost only)
Hardware | Chrome quick-release Sadowsky bridge, lightweight Sadowsky branded tuners, Just-A-Nut adjustable nut, S-Security straplocks
Weight | 8.4 lbs
Case/gig bag included? | Deluxe Sadowsky portabag
Left-hand option available? | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Tones, balance, playability
Minus | None
Overall | Perhaps the ultimate working bass: Looks awesome, sounds even better

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY
 ★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY
 ★★★★★★
VALUE
 ★★★★★★

The MetroLine JV5 costs considerably less than a NYC Sadowsky, but it loses virtually nothing

could find—just like the swamp ash used on this JV5. At just 8.4 lbs (3.8 kg) and despite the smallest hint of neck dive, balance is pretty much ideal, making this a light, comfortable bass to play, whether standing or seated.

The 34" scale neck with its 12" radius maple board is one of the most playable you'll ever lay your hands on. As well as being perfectly finished and fretted with 24 nickel silver frets, the long scale length means a nice taut B-string, which gives an evenness across the strings that translates into almost effortless playability.

Plug in, and it's immediately clear why Sadowsky basses have been revered by the world's top players for decades. The purity of tone is amazing, and however the stacked bass and treble tone controls are set, there's a light openness to the treble frequencies and a rare focus and clarity to the bass. These, used in conjunction with the VTC control, offer a huge range of sounds, always with the emphasis on the uncolored purity of those crucial mids. Sadowsky was a pioneer in using boost-only treble and bass controls at a time when most other luthiers were extolling the use of powerful cut and boost active EQ circuits. Hearing the JV5 in action illustrates just how right he was.

Conclusion

Roger Sadowsky virtually invented the custom-made 'super-Jazz', taking a classic design and making improvements where he felt necessary, while retaining many aspects of the original. His two central design tenets—a lightweight body and passive hum-cancelling pickups with a simple boost-only EQ—made his basses among the very best-sounding instruments available. They still are. This MetroLine JV5 costs considerably less than a NYC Sadowsky, but it loses virtually nothing with regards to sound and little in terms of construction. The tie-up with Warwick should guarantee not just a high and consistent quality in terms of build, but for the first time in nearly 40 years, availability, and affordability. ■



ORANGE

Glenn Hughes Purple Crush 50

An Orange combo, but in purple? That's 'deep purple' to you. Mike Brooks gets to grips with Glenn's signature combo

ORANGE
www.orangeamps.com

\$299

Orange and Glenn Hughes have been a match made in heaven for over 10 years—and this new GH signature combo gives the Orange Crush Bass 50 a purple makeover, with an improved speaker in the rear-ported cabinet and a simple but versatile front end. It's said to deliver smooth clean lows and biting mid-range, alongside a spiky top end... let's find out.

Build Quality

Built in China, the Purple Crush bears all the hallmarks that you might expect of an Orange bass combo. The well-built chassis is covered with the obligatory vinyl—in purple, tipping the hat to Hughes's time with Deep Purple, in case that needs explaining—with black piping trim. The cabinet corners are fitted with metal corner covers for added protection, while the rear of the cabinet features a rear port for an improved spread of the bass frequencies.

Although it's not the lightest combo around, the well-placed top handle makes carrying the unit around fairly easy, while the unit's dimensions are such that transporting it isn't a problem. The cloth speaker cover gives the unit a vintage vibe, while the metal 'Limited Edition' plate, sporting Glenn's signature, is a slick touch.

The control panel is quick and easy to get to grips with. Bells and whistles aren't required to coax immense bass tones out of this combo. For those wishing to use a bass with active electronics, a -6dB pad can be called into play; after that, we're presented

with Gain—used to control the level of clean or dirt in your signal—and Blend, for adding in the Gain level and upper harmonic range to the clean signal. There's a three-band EQ with mid-frequency selection and overall volume, and a chromatic tuner, making on-the-fly tuning simple. The combo comes with headphone and Aux-In sockets, both essential for home practice, while the rear sports Send/Return FX sockets and a footswitchable Blend socket, allowing the player to switch the Blend control in and out as required.

There is no facility for adding extra cabinets to this combo, so at 50 watts, its full capabilities are clear for all to hear. Although an XLR DI connection isn't provided, should you wish to send a signal to a mixer or interface, you can obtain a feed via the headphone out or the Send FX socket. The headphone socket also utilizes a cabinet simulator to create a warmer bass signal. When this socket is in use, the speaker is muted.

Sounds

Orange amplifiers have a reputation for a distinctive tonal character, and the Purple Crush combo maintains that reputation, delivering a warm, rounded clean tone, no matter what type of bass you present it with. The 12" speaker suits this unit extremely well, providing a powerful but warm delivery, with plenty of punch in the mid-range where it matters, and detailed clarity that doesn't grate on the ears.

Let's be honest, though: You wouldn't buy this amp just for its clean tone—the fun and games are saved for the abrasive distortion. This combo delivers on that promise in spades, and accessing the colorfully distorted tones couldn't be any simpler. Experimenting with the Gain and Blend controls will highlight the tones on offer, and then it's merely a case of finding the sweet spot that suits your bass and your playing style. Add your output volume to the recipe, and the Purple Crush delivers. Rock players will find much to enjoy with the tones on offer and how the amp delivers them.

Conclusion

Considering the dimensions of this combo, it puts in a storming performance: Loud, punchy, and formidable. The EQ section offers a usable array of tones, so if a clanky sound isn't what you want but a smooth drive is, that can be delivered. At this price, it won't break the bank, and although you can't add additional cabinets to this setup, it's more than capable of putting in a stellar performance when mic'ed up or with a feed sent to the PA system. A very impressive combo. ■



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | \$299**Made In** | China**Power** | 50 watts RMS**Features** | Pad (-6dB) switch, gain, blend, bass (+/-15dB), mid-frequency (300Hz-2.7kHz), middle (+/-15dB), treble (+/-20dB), volume**Speakers** | 1 x 12" speaker and reflex port**Dimensions** | 490 (H) x 425 (W)
x 275mm (D)**Connections** | 1/4" input (0/-6dB), 3.5mm auxiliary input, 1/4" headphones output, 1/4" Send/Return FX loop, 1/4" jack Blend input (footswitchable)**Weight** | 32 lbs

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Flexible, easy to use, monstrous tones**Minus** | Lacks an XLR DI and speaker connections**Overall** | A fine performer at a very good price

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★★★

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★★★

VALUE

★★★★★★★★★★★

Dylan Hughes
LIMITED
EDITION

NORDSTRAND AUDIO

Starlifter

A pedal format preamp and DI? Lord of the loops
Steve Lawson investigates

NORDSTRAND
www.nordstrandaudio.com

\$349

Bass preamps are all the rage right now—whether it’s because of the passive pickup trend, or because we’re just realizing that it’s easier to have one preamp for multiple basses than to have one installed in every bass, preamp pedals are all over the place. What makes the Starlifter—released under Carey Nordstrand’s ‘Rocket Surgeon Effect Pedal Laboratory’ imprint—most interesting is the company’s existing pedigree for great bass tone. Nordstrand pickups are widely loved, and their onboard preamps are featured in some pretty high end basses. So let’s get stuck in!

The Starlifter makes a formidable first impression, thanks to its considerable size and weight. This is no onboard-preamp in a funky casing, something perhaps most evident by its need for a 15V AC power supply. The Starlifter clearly sits at the studio-sound end of the preamp spectrum, an observation borne out by the range of controls on offer.

The input has switches for both a -10dB pad and between 1MΩ and 10MΩ, to accommodate magnetic pickups and piezo-style upright bass pickups. For the output there’s an XLR DI out with a ground lift and a -20dB pad as well as a pre-EQ option, and a jack out for your amp or to connect to the rest of your signal chain. The versatility of the Starlifter makes it ideal as a front end to a more complex pedal setup, allow you to fine-tune your sound and volume before hitting the rest of your pedals, while also recording a clean signal for future tweaking or blending. The output section also features a tuner out that stays on when the mute switch is engaged for silent on-stage tuning.

When we get to the tone controls, we find ourselves in familiar territory with the three-band bass/mid/treble arrangement. The mid control is coupled to a mid frequency sweep, and for further tonal variation there’s a three position ‘contour’ switch. Labeled ‘vintage’, ‘off’ and ‘modern’, they offer no surprises, just a really useful jump between a more old school bass-heavy tone and a modern mid scooped tone, or the neutral sound of the preamp.

Nordstrand haven’t gone for any kind of signature tone imprint here, just a really well-chosen lean in two directions that you can then shape further with EQ. So good are the two options that I found myself wishing there was a footswitch jack for quicker access—the ‘modern’ tone gave possibly the most useable slap preset EQ I’ve ever encountered, and the ‘vintage’ option very successfully took the edge off the sheen of an active bass without the tone getting lost or requiring further EQ adjustment.

The volume control is an output level control for the jack out only, meaning that the DI section just operates like a standard studio DI, with the option to engage or bypass the EQ. There’s a massive amount of gain available, enough to connect the Starlifter direct to a power amp and use as the entire tone-shaping set-up for your bass if you favor a precise, unprocessed sound. Indeed, the absence of any



further tone shaping or input gain/drive control reveals the intentions of the Starlifter—clean, precise tonal control in a robust, studio-quality package.

The two footswitches are self-explanatory—a mute switch and an ‘engage’ switch that turns the EQ on and off. The volume control functions whether or not the EQ is in, which makes sense given the amount of gain on offer—switching between a bypassed level and the preamp level would only be of use in a very small number of situations, making the EQ on/off far more useful. The engage switch also bypasses the contour, so with it disengaged you just get clean boost. The light rails down either side of the pedal indicate the current state—red for mute and green when the EQ is engaged.

‘Clean’ is a word that comes to mind a lot when playing with the Starlifter—everything about it screams quality and precision. The choices of center frequency and the slope for each of the EQ bands offer a huge range of usable tones, even at the extremes of each control—crank the treble all the way up and the sound sparkles rather than becoming harsh. Turn the bass up full, and so long as it doesn’t overload anything further down the signal chain, you’ve got tons of stadium-shaking, clear low end without encroaching on your mids and highs. Not surprisingly, it feels a lot like using a good studio preamp, with no sense of corners having been cut.

The Starlifter isn’t cheap, but for the quality it offers, it’s surprisingly affordable. The weight could also be an issue if your normal mode of getting to gigs is flying with your pedalboard in your hand luggage. For almost every other situation, Nordstrand’s contribution to the preamp pedal world is a welcome one that’s sure to fit the bill for many players in myriad situations. ■

ROCKET SURGEON[™]
EFFECT PEDAL
LABORATORY

STARLINE
BASS PRE

vintage

off

modern

contour

vol

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | \$349

Made In | USA

Controls | Mute, Engage, Volume, Contour, Treble, Mid, Mid Frequency, Bass

Features | Switchable impedance on the input for electric/upright bass, -20dB pad and pre/post EQ DI out

Power | 15V AC power adaptor (included)

Dimensions |

165 x 101 x 44mm

Weight | 2.5 lbs

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Pristine studio quality sound in a sturdy pedal format

Minus | May not offer radical enough tone shaping for some; very heavy

Overall | A vital new addition to the ranks of the preamp pedal

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★★

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★★

VALUE

★★★★★★★★★

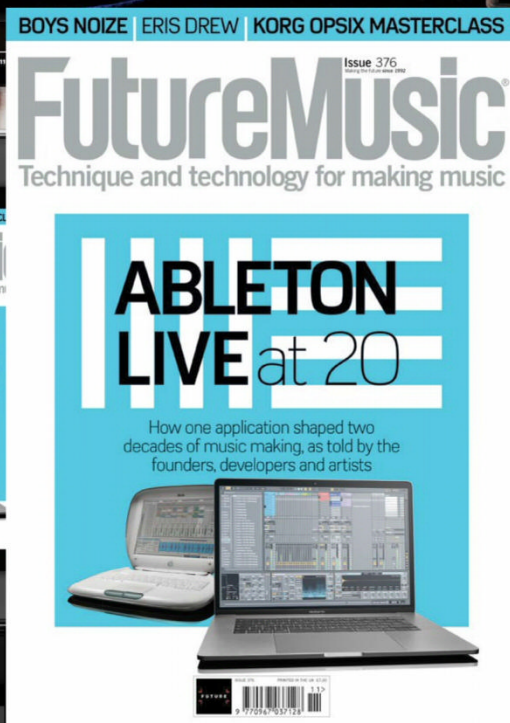
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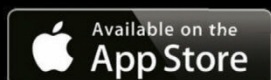
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I SPY...

62

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 her website. www.ryanmadora.com
Facebook ryanmadoramusic
Twitter RyanMadora
Instagram ryanmadora



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 Donelly, Divinity Roxx, and Jonas Hellborg. He been teaching bass for almost three decades, and lectures at universities and colleges across the globe. Victor Wooten once commented, 'Steve Lawson is a brilliant musician. I've known about him and listened to him for many years. He may not be one of the most famous bassists—but he is definitely one of the most talented'. Who are we to argue? www.stevelawson.net
Facebook solobasssteve
Twitter solobasssteve
Instagram solobasssteve



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. www.withbassinmind.com
Facebook With-Bass-In-Mind
YouTube With Bass In Mind
Instagram with_bass_in_mind



ADVANCED

76

RICH BROWN

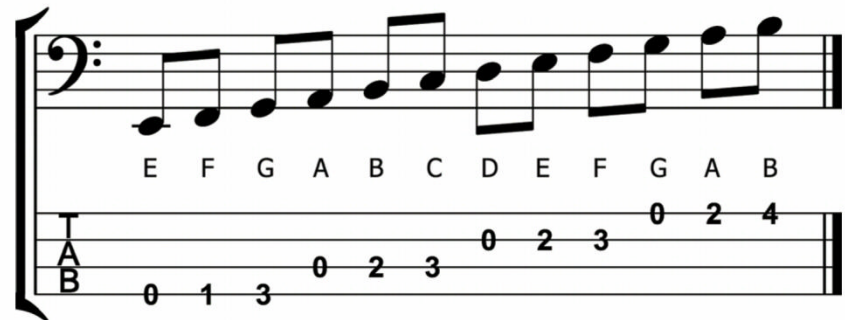
Maximize your bass skills with our advanced studies Toronto-born electric bassist Rich Brown has established himself as an incredibly versatile artist. Along with being one of the most called-upon electric bass players in Canada, Rich is a composer, producer, bandleader, educator and clinician, broadcaster, and voiceover artist. He has recorded three albums as a leader, including his critically acclaimed album of solo bass compositions *Between Heaviness & Here*. Rich appears on a plethora of recordings, ranging from jazz to traditional Arabic and Asian music. He has performed with a wide variety of artists, including Rudresh Mahanthappa, Vijay Iyer, Steve Coleman, and Angelique Kidjo. Rich leads two groups—rinsethealgorithm and The Abeng—and was nominated for a Juno Award in 2016 for his latest album, *Abeng*. fbass.com/artists/rich-brown
Instagram richbrownbass
Youtube Brown'stone With Rich Brown

BP Notation Legend

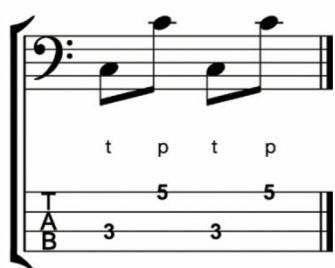
The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in Bass Player magazine

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

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

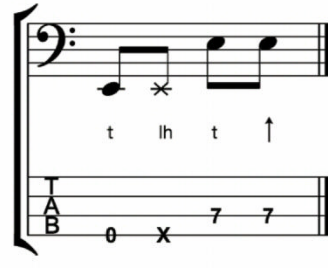


PLAYING TECHNIQUES



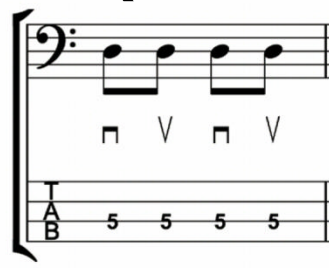
SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE

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



ADVANCED SLAP TECHNIQUE

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



PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE

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



TAPPING TECHNIQUES

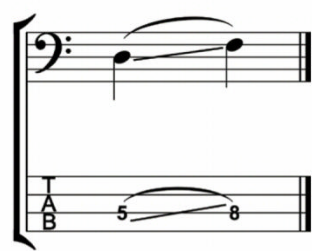
Fretting hand taps have a '+' in a circle. Picking hand taps are just '+'. Particular fingers may be shown with numbers.

FRETTING TECHNIQUES



HAMMER-ON AND PULL-OFF

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



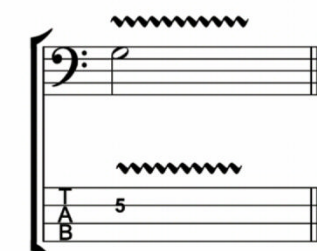
SLIDE (GLISSANDO)

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



TRILLS

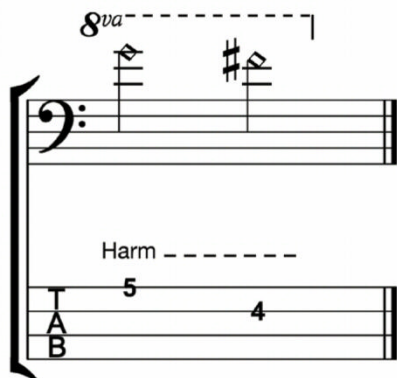
Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown, using hammer-ons and pull-offs.



VIBRATO

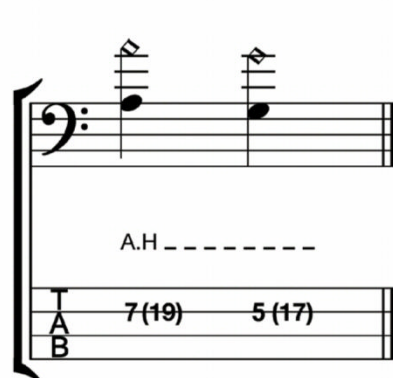
The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger.

PLAYING HARMONICS



NATURAL HARMONICS

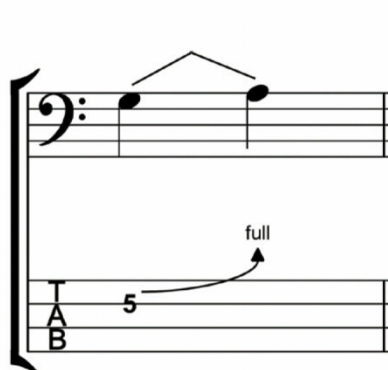
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated.



ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

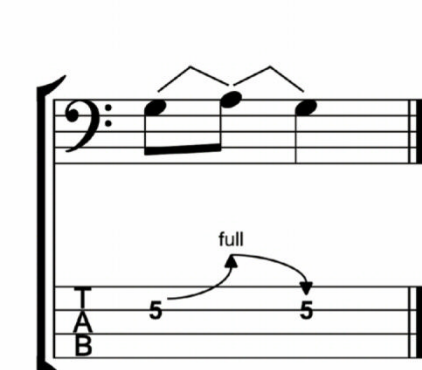
Pluck while fretting the lower note and touching the edge of the picking hand thumb to the note in brackets.

BENDING NOTES



BEND

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



BEND AND RELEASE

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



Nashville-based session and stage bassist Ryan Madora is here to dig into bass parts that we know and love for useful information. Pay attention!

I SPY...

PLAYING EIGHTH NOTES, PART TWO

Hey there, bass players! I hope you're positively jazzed about our discussion of rhythmic nuance—I know we've been walking, pedalling, and pushing our way through these concepts, and I'm glad you're with us on the bandstand. All kidding aside, there are so many ways to interpret how to play eighth notes, so we're going to do a quick review of terminology, discuss how to vary the feel of eighth notes, and then dig in with new exercises.

As we learned in my previous column, we can subdivide quarter notes—in other words, four beats per bar in 4/4 time—into smaller rhythmic increments. If we play two equal attacks within the space of a quarter note, the result is eight eighth notes: This makes sense, doesn't it? When we do this consistently over a full bar, we would refer to the technique as driving or pedalling. Extremely common in rock and pop music, these driving eighth notes provide momentum and a smooth roadbed for the band.

Now that you're familiar with this technique, we're going to take it a step further by focusing on feel. This comes down to note duration. Our good friends legato and staccato are knocking on our door, yet again. Legato eighth notes will provide a smoother ride, hence the notion of pedalling. Staccato eighth notes introduce a bit of space between each attack and therefore, create more of a pulse.

By controlling our note duration, we can play with greater musicality and experiment with the overall groove. In fact, a very common tactic is to play punchier, staccato eighth notes during a verse, and then smoother, legato eighth notes during a chorus. This slight change in feel can make all the difference, especially when other members of the rhythm section follow suit.

Let's practice this concept with **Exercise 1**. We'll use our friendly I-IV-V-I chord progression in the key of G. Play each chord for one bar (G, C, D, and G) and use consistent eighth notes. Play the first four bars legato and allow the eighth notes to run into each

other; then repeat the progression but tighten up on your note duration. Gently lift your fretting finger between each note to shorten the duration and add space between each attack. This should introduce a pulse. Practice this with a metronome but don't aim for speed: Focus instead on accuracy. If the tempo is set too high, it will be extremely difficult to play staccato. Set too low, and the music may seem to drag. You may find a sweet spot between 70bpm and 100bpm.

Now that we've introduced a pulse, we're going to accentuate it. By digging in and accenting particular notes within a bar, we add rhythmic emphasis and define the feel, especially when our drummer friends are doing the same. Speaking of drummers, their kick drum patterns often provide us with cues for when and how to emphasize particular beats. As we start spying songs, you'll hear how the bass player and drummer lock in with one another to deepen the pocket.

Exercise 2 can help with this. Using the aforementioned chord progression, play

EXERCISE ONE

♩ = 80

The exercise consists of two systems of musical notation. Each system has a bass staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first system includes a 'simile' instruction and a fretboard diagram below it. The fretboard diagram shows fingerings for the first four bars (3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3) and the last four bars (5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5). The second system also includes a 'simile' instruction and a fretboard diagram with the same fingerings.

staccato root notes across the four-bar phrase, just like we did in Exercise 1. This time, however, we're going to start stacking accented beats to adapt the feel. In **2a**, accent just the downbeat (beat one). Play this beat louder, and then back off just a bit for the rest of the bar. In **2b**, accent both the downbeat and the 'and-of-two'. In **2c**, accent the downbeat, the 'and-of-two' and beat four, and finally, in exercise **2d**, accent all of the downbeats, and back off on the upbeats.

Once you're comfortable accenting beats and articulating eighth notes, let's smooth things out a bit. Easing the transition between root notes can be a welcome addition to our rhythmic arsenal, plus it's a great way to add another layer of complexity to our eighth-note bass-line. Draw your attention to the 'and-of-four' or the final eighth note of the bar. Don't cut this note short: Instead, try to elongate the feel just a bit, or use this moment to slide into the downbeat of the next bar.

Let's practice this in **Exercise 3**. In the first phrase, play each note staccato except for the 'and-of-four'. This is a very subtle change in feel, but it should provide just a bit of rhythmic variation and smooth out the transition. In the second phrase, we'll make two adjustments. First, we'll use that final eighth note to slide into the downbeat of the next chord. Second, we'll find the IV and V chord higher on the neck (C on the 8th fret of the E string and D on the 10th fret). This will add a bit of rock and roll to your slide and provide a heartier tone. Hello, fretboard knowledge!

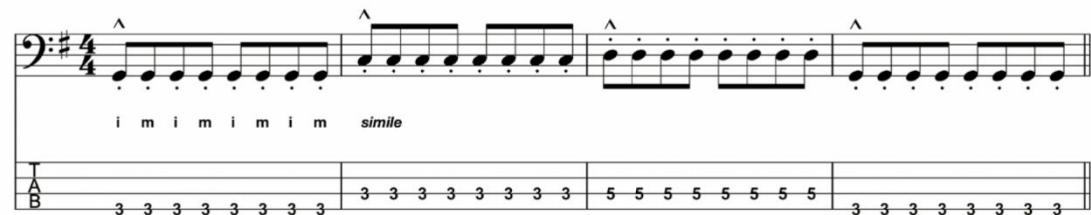
As you play through these exercises, you should recognize how the slightest change can make a difference in the overall pocket. Quite amazing, isn't it? Let's spot these in the wild and do some spying. First up, the Tina Turner classic, 'The Best'. The downbeat and the 'and-of-two' are emphasized by the bass, drums, and synth, just like the groove in Exercise 2b.

Next, take a listen to 'Making Plans For Nigel' by XTC. This 1979 rocker will definitely challenge your staccato eighth notes. The tempo is brisk and the attack is punchy. Lengthy slides connect the changes during the verse, providing just a bit of smoothness and showcasing the importance of articulation.

Last but not least, one of the funkier examples of eighth note pulsing is 'If You Want Me To Stay' by Sly & The Family Stone. Not only is this a hallmark of funk and soul bass playing, but it demonstrates how rhythmic accents and leading tones make for a memorable part. If you don't have this under your fingers, I suggest grabbing your bass pronto. See you next month! ■

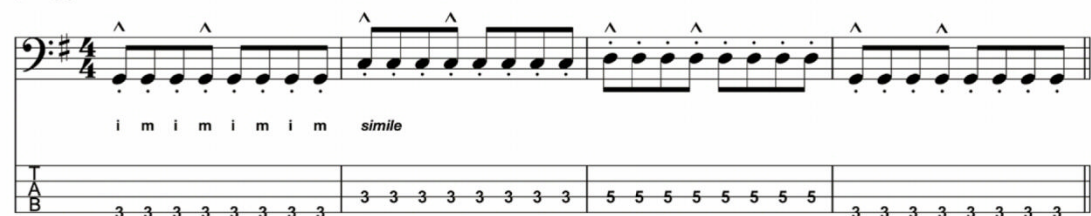
EXERCISE TWO

♩ = 80



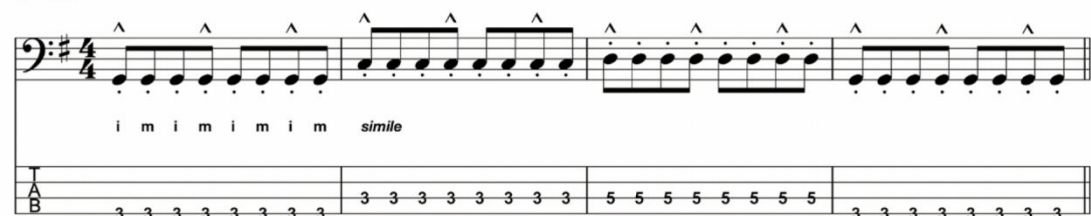
A

♩ = 80



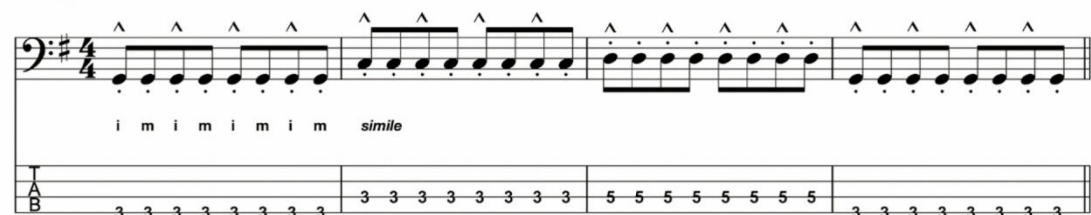
B

♩ = 80



C

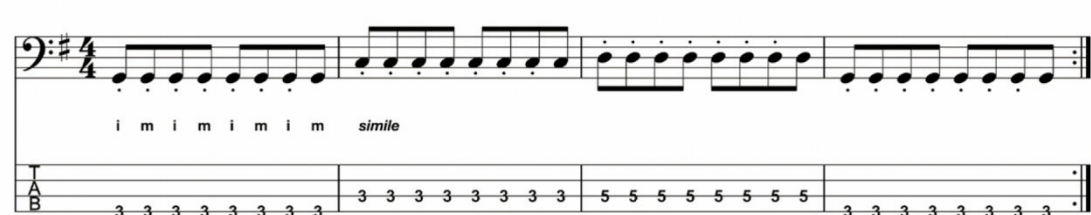
♩ = 80



D

EXERCISE THREE

♩ = 80



FUNK IT UP!

INVESTIGATE FUNK BASS PLAYING



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

Welcome! In all my years of teaching, the one style that students associate most with flashy bass playing is funk. Thanks largely to a number of pop bands who drew heavily on funk ideas and grooves such as Level 42 and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, we have this idea that funk is a style that hangs on the virtuosity and extravagant dexterity of the bass player.

However, even a cursory journey into purer forms of funk, into the bands that effectively invented the style and developed it from the various groove innovations happening in soul music in the Sixties, shows us that there's a huge technical range in what bassists bring to funk music, so there's room for us in a beginner column to start thinking about what we can bring to the party when starting out with a less auspicious bag of technical tricks.

Without disappearing down a Cultural Studies rabbit-hole, funk is best understood as a feel or an orientation towards groove, rather than an expression of complexity. Many, though not all, funk grooves rely on specifically emphasized syncopation in the

bass and drums, and there are a few standard simple chordal ideas that we can add to our musical tool kit that will help us approach songs in a funkier way.

What we're looking at today won't in any way make you an expert on funk, but it will give you some ideas for approaching music with a greater awareness of what it is that makes things funky, and will hopefully enable you to bring that to your playing in whatever situation you find yourself in.

The first and perhaps most foundational skill in funk bass is being able to lock in with

it out as funk, so it's important that you and your drummer take some time to think about what makes a part funky. Depending on how you play this in terms of tone, note length and any dynamic accent you place on particular notes, this could be a rock groove, a country groove, a pop groove or a funk groove. So, without adding anything to it, 'lean' towards funk. Pause regularly to discuss what it is that's working.

If you're doing this exercise on your own, try programming the beat in as written and then varying the hi-hat sound and dynamics

Though important in many kinds of music, in funk, the lock between the bass and the drums is elevated to an art form all of its own

if you can. If you're using drum loops from YouTube or loops inside your DAW, find eighth note grooves that fit the pattern in a variety of styles and spend

the kick drum. This is important in many kinds of music, but in funk the lock between the bass and drums is elevated to an art form all of its own. While most funk music relies on a sixteenth note subdivision, let's start with a simple eighth note groove. I'll write out the bass and drums so we can see how they fit together.

EXERCISE ONE

So far, there's nothing about this that singles

some time thinking about what it is about the drums that make it funky. Remember, funk isn't just about what the bass player does—funkiness is a collective responsibility, and a bass player trying to make another style funky is very often a trainwreck if it's not a decision that the whole band has taken!

What you may find is that leaving a big gap around the snare helps a lot to create the kind of space in the groove that we often associate with funk. Whether we're talking

EXERCISE ONE

We will fight anyone
who says that
Bootsy isn't the
coolest bassist ever.



★ Beginners Lesson

EXERCISE TWO

The musical notation for Exercise Two is presented in three staves. The top staff is a drum line in 4/4 time, showing a pattern of eighth notes and rests. The middle staff is a bass line in 4/4 time, featuring a mix of eighth and quarter notes. The bottom staff is a guitar line, indicated by a 'T' for treble and 'B' for bass clef, showing a sequence of fret numbers: 3, 3, 3, 5, 3, 5, 1, 3.

about modern funk-pop grooves like ‘Uptown Funk’, or P-Funk classics like ‘Flashlight’—on which Bootsy Collins played drums and Bernie Worrell played keyboard bass!—the gaps in the line are integral to the funk feel. Far more so than the fills, it’s the use of space and the placement of those shorter notes that gives the feel its real foundations in funk.

As one of funk’s most influential originators, Bootsy’s admonishment to focus on ‘the one’ is very important—de-emphasizing beat 3 somewhat may help with that sense that beat 1 is where the groove begins, and as we add variation to this

line, the importance of resolving back to the one will become more apparent.

You’ll notice that the biggest hole in the line so far is on beat 4: There’s no drum fill, no bass note, not even an extra kick drum leading back to the start of the next bar. It’s important to think about what happens in those gaps, and to realize that very often the task of filling it will rest with someone else.

One aspect of a truly great funk rhythm section that often distinguishes it from a rock rhythm section is the significance of guitar to the groove. It’s always great when the guitarist has a strong sense of time, but in funk it’s imperative that the guitar is locked

in and often playing an equal role in establishing the feel.

Listen to any Chic track and you’ll hear that Nile Rodgers’ contribution to the grooves is easily as important as Bernard Edwards and Tony Thompson’s. The fills that elevate the grooves and bring an added layer of complexity to Chic tunes are often single-note guitar lines that weave in and out of the bass and drum groove. So as you’re building your concept of funk grooves, make sure you leave room for guitar or keyboard additions and practice your developing lines with the whole band.

It’s a grave mistake to think that the bass and drums need to sound complete without the rest of the band in there, and you may find yourself having to remove large sections of your playing when the other musicians join in, if you don’t take account of that likelihood at this stage!

Okay, let’s shift the second kick drum and the corresponding bass note to a sixteenth before beat three, and vary the line in bar 3 to create a stronger four-bar phrase.

EXERCISE TWO

Again, we can mess around with the feel and sound to see what decisions enhance the funk feel and which ones push it towards other styles. One thing you might want to ask your drummer to try is playing it as a ‘linear’ drum part—that is, only ever hitting one drum at a time. To do this, all they need to do is miss out the hi-hat on each beat, so the hats are only on the off-beat. These kinds of adjustments will give you a greater range of options to explore, as you pursue specific aspects of funk in your arrangements.

Remember, funk is a broad church, and there aren’t really any hard and fast rules that define all the music that comes under the funk banner. So what we’re devising



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EXERCISE THREE

The musical notation for Exercise Three is written in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a series of notes and rests, with a final measure marked with a double bar line and repeat dots. The bass staff contains a series of notes and rests, also with a final measure marked with a double bar line and repeat dots. Below the notation is a sequence of numbers: 3, 3, 3, 3, 5, 5, 1, 3, 3, 1, 3.

here is a set of start points for exploring our perception of funkiness and how to move towards, rather than away from, those elements in the music.

Now that we're adding in extra notes to the line, we can start thinking about articulation. Try Exercise 2 again, and this time include a short slide up to the first beat of the third bar, then try it with a slide down from the G to the F at the start of the bar. Try it again, but palm-mute the whole line. Each of these will change the timing of the line in subtle ways that will probably also cause your drummer to react in new ways, and you'll start to collectively make adjustments that will be the beginnings of your own take on funk. Ideally, this will be an amalgam of influences that you've taken from listening to and practicing specific grooves.

These exercises are an entry point designed to be used in parallel with song learning to start that process of personalization. If you're playing in a covers band, it may be important to nail very specific aspects of a particular player's approach. But for original music, or for a band that does their own arrangements of well-known songs, it's really important that your collective exploration of your combined feel as a band is built into your practice sessions.

This adds a layer of intention and a measurable output to the task of 'just jamming' which we often associate with aimless, fun, indulgent playing. There's a great deal of value in spending long periods of time sitting on grooves, trying out ideas, and hopefully this process of trying to take note of the aspects of your own part that make it sound more or less funky will help you to listen more deeply and communicate better with the musicians you're playing with. As we've noted before, recording your rehearsals and listening back can be an

amazing way to hear what you actually sound like—without the joy and excitement of playing your instrument clouding your ability to listen honestly.

As we said at the start of this column, syncopation plays a big part in many funk grooves, so let's try displacing the notes in this line and talk a little about how to make that comfortable. Here's the line with beat 3 shifted...

EXERCISE THREE

Once again, we're heading out of the lane that people imagine a 'beginner' column should be in, but what this demonstrates is the incremental nature of what we perceive as difficult. The amount of time it takes you to get to a particular point is less significant than the steps you take to understand what's required, and than the effort you put into assimilating all the information that will help you get to your goal.

In this instance, the rhythm pattern in bars one and two is a very familiar funk feel. If reading it feels daunting because of the sixteenth notes, try programming it into MuseScore or a similar scorewriting program. Once you hear it, even just with a click, you'll recognize it, and you'll start on the task of playing what you hear in your head. After all, that's always the aim: To know what you're aiming for and then making it happen.

The vast majority of reading notation is about knowing ahead of time what those notes are meant to sound like, not just moving your fingers and being surprised by what comes out. So programming it isn't in any way 'cheating' or spoiling your learning: It's about adding to the pool of rhythmic ideas that you recognize, so the next time it comes around you know what it looks like. We have so many amazing digital tools at

our disposal that it would be a shame not to employ them to accelerate our learning.

Note that in Exercise 3 the bass and kick drum are still totally locked in. There are three notes in the whole bass-line that don't have kick drums attached, and two of those are on the snare. Our line is getting fuller, and it's now time to start experimenting with what else might fit around it. Your homework is to start thinking about what this kind of simple, one-chord groove offers to the musicians you're playing with. The greatness of your bass playing is always contextual: Virtuoso playing in the wrong context isn't great, but discipline to sit on a groove and play consistently with the drummer for the length of the song can equate to greatness.

So take this through the steps: Start with your drummer or drum loop, vary the way you play the line to get a handle on which aspects are best altered to enhance the funk feel—dynamics, tone, note length, and articulation—develop the parts as we've done in Exercises 2 and 3, then bring in guitar or keys and see what they add to the party.

We live in such an incredible time for musical experimentation, and so many sub-genres are forming out of the hybridization of other styles. Still, it's always worthwhile going back to the roots of a genre, so take some time to listen to early James Brown, Curtis Mayfield, Funkadelic, Parliament, Don Blackman, the Meters, Chic, Pleasure, and a host of other funk pioneers. Not just to learn their bass-lines—although that's deeply worthwhile, obviously—but to train your ears to recognize the characteristics of funk so you can apply them to simpler lines while you develop the technical skills required to play those more dexterous lines that we all aspire to. Funkiness is within your grasp—just use your ears! ■



Thunder Thumbs
himself: The late,
much-missed Louis
Johnson.



NEXT STEPS

MODES WITH MELODIC MINOR



Phil Mann is a stage and session star and educator extraordinaire. Get ready to step up your bass game!

Hello again! Over the last few instalments of our Intermediate column, we've been investigating melodic minor, its harmonization, and uses—but the time has now come for us to delve a little deeper and explore the astonishing array of modes associated with this parent scale. Melodic minor truly is the gift which keeps on giving, as unlike major harmony, it's very common to extract modes from their naturally residing

Melodic minor truly is the gift which keeps on giving

diatonic position, and apply them to alternative scenarios.

For example, there are three modes within melodic minor that can all easily be employed over a Dominant 7th chord. Lydian Dominant, residing on the fourth diatonic degree, is one of the aforementioned structures and is an exceptional resource for revitalizing and conveying dominant chords. Better still, it's not too dissimilar to Mixolydian, so overall you'll find it quite simple to portray. ■

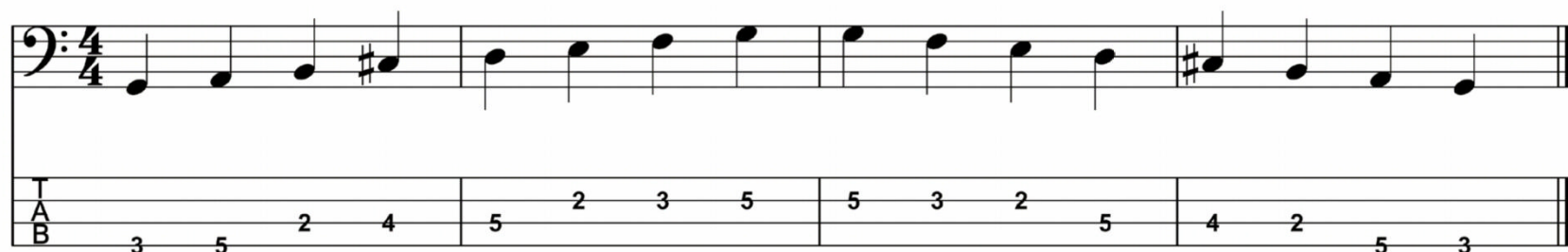
Melissa Auf Der Maur: a highly melodic player



Mitchell Gerber/Corbis/VCG via Getty

EXERCISE ONE

♩ = 100



Lydian Dominant is typically accompanied by a Dom7th (#11) chord, the harmonic equivalent of a Dom7th chord on steroids, but as a four-note structure, the aforementioned are identical. It's the extension of a #11 which supercharges it! Therefore, an opportunity arises when the vocabulary can be cross-pollinated. But before we delve into that, let's reacquaint ourselves with a rudimental Dom7th arpeggio. The following measures are delivered over two complete octaves, but in order to deliver a Dom7th arpeggios over such a distance, you'll need to duplicate both the root position and first inversion.

EXERCISE TWO

♩ = 100

G⁷

As we become more and more aware of the presence of Lydian Dominant, it's important to be able to reproduce the structure fluidly over multiple octaves, and preferably in an array of different keys. Exercise 2 revisits our preliminary study, but this time delivers the melodic content over two octaves—the arrows located between the staves indicate a change in position for the fretting hand. Once you're familiar with the study, attempt to transpose it chromatically, through all 12 keys.

EXERCISE THREE

♩ = 85

G⁷(#11)

With so much emphasis focused upon 7th arpeggios and their surrounding diatonic information, it's not unusual for many of us to be unaware, or confused, by what happens in the compound register—those intervals which exist beyond the restraints of I-III-V-VII. Well, in short, this is where the bulk of harmonic variation resides, as it's where a variety of textures are produced to enhance the rudimental harmonic foundations.

EXERCISE FOUR

♩ = 100

G⁷(#11)

Lydian Dominant is a wonderful tool for adding drama to chord progressions. Exercise 4 presents a G Dom7th (#11) in arpeggiated form, extended to the 13th. This chord is essentially a more sophisticated rendition of a conventional Dom7th chord, and can be employed in many of the same musical circumstances.

★ Intermediate Lesson

EXERCISE FIVE

♩ = 100

G⁷ G⁷(#11)

3 5 3 2 5 2 3 5 5 3 2 4 5 2 5 3

Traditionally, you'll find a semitone residing the third and fourth degrees of the Mixolydian mode, but in Lydian Dominant this semitone appears between the augmented fourth and fifth degrees. The result is a contrasting melodic feature not habitually found in Mixolydian. Essentially, Lydian Dominant is subtly rewiring the melodic portrayal of Dom7th chords in a refreshingly effective way. Play through these measures and be extra vigilant about the subtle differences.

EXERCISE SIX

♩ = 75

G⁷(#11) C⁷(#11)

2 0 2 4 5 X 2 3 4 5 2 X 2 3 5 2 X 2 3 4 5

7 5 7 9 10 X 7 8 9 10 7 X 7 8 10 7 X 2 3 4 5

To reiterate: Lydian Dominant and its coinciding Dom7th (#11) chord can be used in conjunction with one another to spice up a conventional Dom7th chord. This exercise delivers an infectious groove over a simple I7–IV7 chord progression. As you transcend the measures, you'll become sensitive to the augmented fourth within a Dom7th (#11). Be mindful that your ear will want to revise some of the notes, but doing so will be contrary to our intents. Remember that the point of all these investigations is to create some alternative resolutions!



Living Colour's
first bassist,
Muzz Skillings.

Paul Bergen/Redferns/Getty

EXERCISE SEVEN

♩ = 75

G7(#11)

Bass line for G7(#11) in 4/4 time. The notation shows a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a corresponding fingering line below it.

Fingering for G7(#11):

3	3	4	5	5	4	5	5	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	4	5	5	4	5	5	3	2	4	2	4	5	2
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

C7(#11)

Bass line for C7(#11) in 4/4 time. The notation shows a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a corresponding fingering line below it.

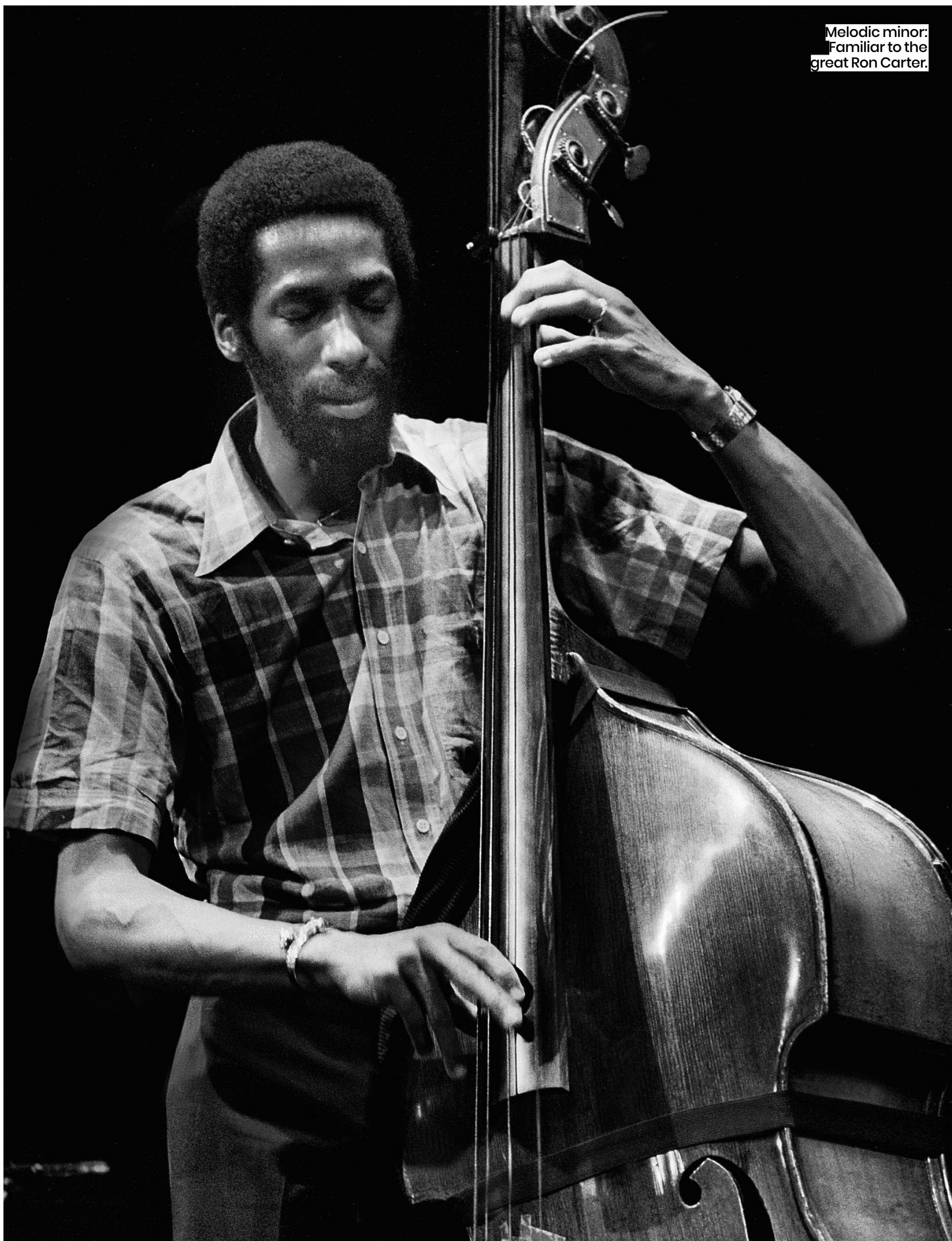
Fingering for C7(#11):

8	8	9	10	10	9	10	10	8	7	7	8	7	8	8	9	10	10	9	10	10	8	7	8	9
---	---	---	----	----	---	----	----	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	---	----	----	---	---	---	---

When two notes are positioned close to one another, they tend to clash. This is the first of two ways of producing dissonance. The other is in the application of tritones. A tritone (six semitones) creates a substantial amount of dissonance, so much so that the interval is said to have been banned by certain Middle Ages authorities. These days, the interval is used in a variety of circumstances, but its role remains the same—to create dissonance. This is a defining factor utilized in Dom7th #11 chords, as the structure exhibits not one, but two, tritone intervals. Exercise 7 investigates these melodic attributes.

★ Intermediate Lesson

Melodic minor:
Familiar to the
great Ron Carter.



Paul Martin/Getty

EXERCISE EIGHT

♩ = 100

G7(#11)

G Dom7th Arpeggio A Major Triad A Major Triad G Dom7th Arpeggio

T 3 2 5 3 4 7 7 14 14 11 12 10 12 9 10

B 3 2 5 3 5 4 7 7 14 14 11 12 10 12 9 10

When learning a new piece of vocabulary, it's important that you are able to visualize the structure, even without the presence of your bass. For some of us, today's studies may be an entirely new discipline, so the initial learning of Lydian Dominant may prove daunting. Don't worry—there are some simple methodologies that will aid your progress. For instance, rather than spending hours running the extended arpeggio, you could visualize the structure as a G Dom7th paired with an A major triad constructed from the 9th. This approach is a piece of cake to portray, and even extends our vocabulary by enveloping the 13th!

EXERCISE NINE

♩ = 75

G7(#11)

G7(#11) C7(#11) G7(#11)

T 3 5 2 3 4 5 7 6 7 5 3 2 3 3 1 3 1 3 5 2 3 4 5 7 6 7 5 3 2 3 3 1 3 1

B 3 5 2 3 4 5 7 6 7 5 3 2 3 3 1 3 1 3 5 2 3 4 5 7 6 7 5 3 2 3 3 1 3 1

This month's final exercise employs the methodologies from the last study to inspire a Lydian Dominant motif. The key to successfully portraying the measures lies in your ability to visualize where the G Dom7th arpeggio and A major triad reside. Until next time...

If you only practice one thing this month...

The Mixolydian mode is regarded as the habitual vocabulary to employ in conjunction with Dom7th chords. However, the fourth mode of Melodic Minor, Lydian Dominant, is a wonderful alternative that can be utilized to create subsequent melodic textures. In doing so, the essential chord tones are still honored, but the remaining diatonic information enveloping them is varied. If you practice just once thing this month, learn the Lydian Dominant mode over one octave—as in Exercise 1—and then use it to compose bass-lines and fills over a Dom7th chord. To highlight its unique melodic textures, focus on the relationships between the fourth and fifth diatonic degrees.

ONE UP!

SHOULD WE PLAY ON THE ONE?



Rich Brown guides us to Advanced level every month. Read on as he takes us to the very top of bass technique!

Hi there! Look back a few pages, and you'll see a great lesson on funk playing from my colleague Steve Lawson. He mentions that when you hear musicians talk about funk or groove, you'll often hear them say that everything has to be 'on the one'. This lesson is going to challenge that theory a little bit.

In my first lesson for *Bass Player*, I talked about the importance of gaining a deep understanding of each note within the 16th note subdivision—the so-called '1-E-&-a'. In that lesson, we isolated each note while playing with a metronome, and in going through this lesson with my students, it is the 'E' and the 'a' of the bar that they tend to find most challenging. If you also find

that you have difficulty with these specific notes, I hope this lesson will help to make things a bit more comfortable. This one is going to be fun!

Our primary focus for today will be the 'a' of the 16th note subdivision—as above, 1-E-&-a. While we'll be working on our time and syncopation, we'll also be playing some fun and groovin' lines that are sure to make you feel precisely where these syncopations are supposed to sit. I highly suggest playing these with a metronome. If you've got some funky—but not too busy—drum grooves or loops, you can play along with those, too. Let's begin!

Before you even pick up the bass, you need to establish where you naturally feel the time. This exercise is vital. Some of you

might be feeling the time ahead of the beat, and others might be behind the beat. The rest of you are right on the money! So, just as I suggested in my first *BP* article, I'll have you set a metronome to 80bpm with beats 1 and 3 turned off. Start by counting quarter notes, then moving on to eighth notes, and finally the 16th note subdivision against the 2 and 4—or backbeat.

You have to be honest with yourself here before you move on. Are you behind, are you ahead, or are you on the money? Keep counting and make the necessary adjustments to get you in the groove. Once you're there, it's time to grab your bass and get to playing.

We'll begin with something simple. Here's **Exercise 1**:

EXERCISE ONE



What we're doing here is focusing primarily on the 'a' of each quarter note, but even in its simplicity, this exercise also makes for a very funky bass-line. This may even be because of its simplicity. When you start to feel how the 'a' of each quarter note sits so perfectly against the backbeat—the 2 and 4—you know you're in the pocket.

This exercise might not be easy for some, so take your time: You'll get there. In this first exercise, we're only playing the low E and its octave. I want you to focus on your time without having to worry about playing too many notes. We'll keep the rhythm the same in the next exercise, but we'll add a few notes to the harmonic palette for a bit more of a challenge.

EXERCISE 2





Laura Lee of
Khruangbin

There's another aspect to these lines that I'll address here. Consider this as a lesson within a lesson. A great thing to do would be to try playing these examples in different positions. By accessing different areas on the fretboard, you have more choices when you want to add fills. Let's take a closer look at **Exercise 2**.

Immediately, I see three different ways we can play this line, and I think it's essential to learn them all. The first way will have you play the D on the open string. This way, I can position my left hand with a four-finger span covering frets 1 to 4. Each finger then plays its corresponding fret according to the note. In this first position, you can play fills using

the E minor pentatonic scale. All open strings are fair game in this position.

The second way to play this line places the left hand in a four-fret span, covering frets 2 to 5. The cool thing about this second way is that your left hand is perfectly positioned to play the G Lydian scale. Try playing a G Lydian scale—a regular G major scale, but the fourth note is sharp—ascending and descending, but when you get back to that low G, follow that up with the open E.

Notice how all those notes sound great against the E minor harmony? This realization is significant, because it immediately breaks us out of the E minor pentatonic box by giving us an entirely new scale from which we can build. Now, when you play in this second position of Exercise 2, you'll be able to see and even hear the line differently as your fingers find the same notes in this new position. Pretty cool, huh?

Let's get to the third way [**Exercise 3**]. All we have to do is move our four-fret span from the previous position to a span from frets 4 to 7, so now let's play Exercise 2 again, using this new position on the fretboard.

Try playing these examples in different areas across the fretboard to allow for more fills

Same notes—different fingering! The only tricky part might be the stretch from G to E at the top of the fifth bar.

Take a close look at what you're playing here. In this third position, you can see that you're essentially playing the notes of an A7 or Mixolydian scale. So this time, try running the A Mixolydian scale ascending and descending, and listen to the way those notes sound against your E minor harmony. It all works! We'll dive more into this idea in a future lesson. For now, let's get back to our rhythm.

We've already established that our main rhythmic focus is going to be the 'a's of the bar. Now, I usually don't recommend this, but I'm making an exception for this exercise. While playing these lines, I want you to sing the 'a's in these lines out loud. Feel where they fall against the backbeat, and get this specific syncopation into your body. If these are the notes that you find most challenging, this is a great way to make them feel a lot

Hats off to the great, great Ray Brown.



EXERCISE 3



It's Miller time!
(again)



Advanced Lesson

EXERCISE 4



EXERCISE 5



EXERCISE 6



better. I've written a few more examples for you to play, and I'm assigning you these tasks:

- Before you play, count the 16th note subdivision out loud and accent the notated rhythms. This tip also helps to improve your reading.
- Play these examples in different positions on the fretboard. Each time you move to a

different position, you access a different scale, giving you more options for adding your own fills.

- Play these examples at various tempos. Faster tempos might raise the degree of difficulty as far as technique is concerned, but slower tempos could also pose a challenge regarding your feel and accuracy with the syncopations.
- Check your posture when you're practicing.

Make sure you're as relaxed as possible. It can make all the difference in your feel and execution.

- Have fun with these! I'd love to know which ones of these are your favorites.

That's all for now, my friends. I hope you enjoy this lesson, and I hope it helps you on your journey to becoming the best bass player you can be. ■

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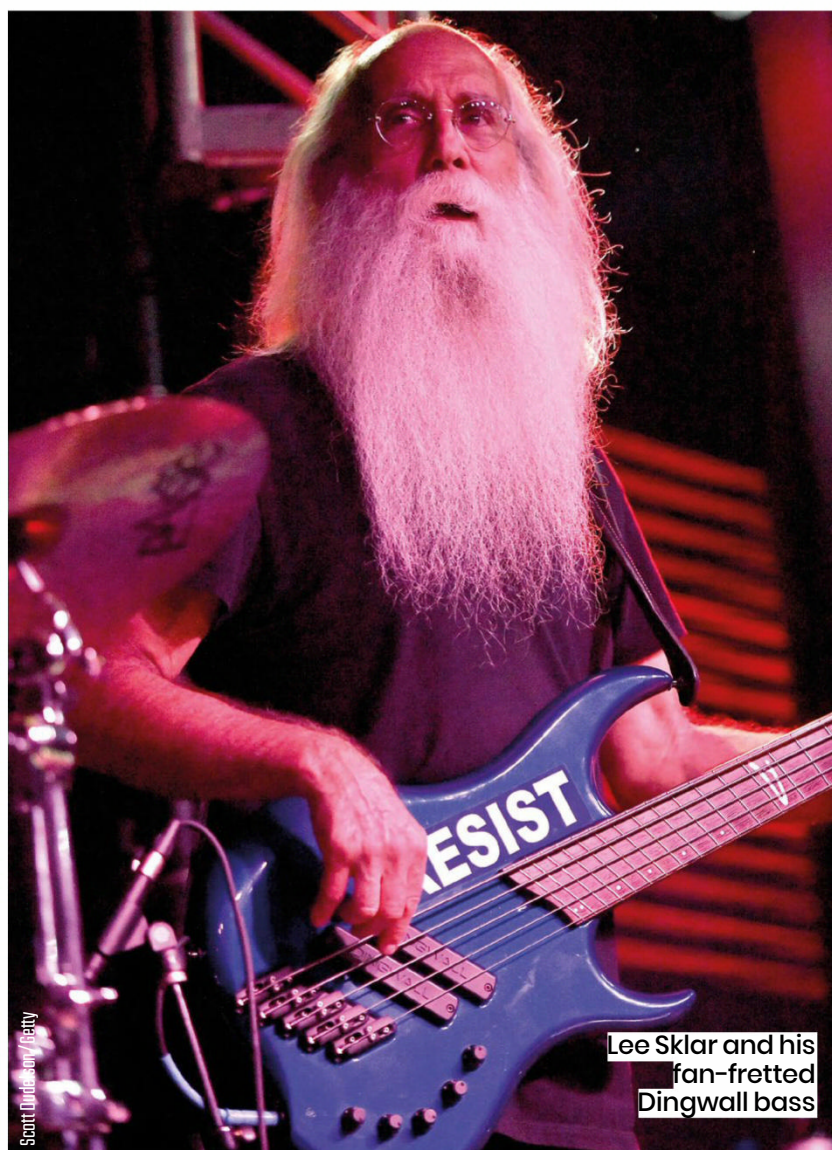
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Hello again! As you no doubt know, tuneable instruments such as bass guitars abide by a tuning system known as 'equal temperament'. This simply means that we slice up an octave into 12 equal portions, which we call semitones. This widely adopted system is the basis for the majority of the music heard in the Western world. Why? Well, the most convenient part of this system is that any arrangement of intervals you play will have the same sound, no matter where you start within those 12 semitones. It also allows us to transpose music and play it in a different key without having to retune our instruments.

You're going to point out a flaw in this system, aren't you?
Yes I am! It turns out that instruments tuned using equal temperament are a bit out of tune, all the time. However, this is intentional, and our ears have become accustomed to it.

So it's not really a problem?
Well, it is possible to hear the shortcomings of equal temperament in isolation. Some of the finest minds in the bass world have created methods to fix this problem, usually based on irregular fretting systems versus the commonplace parallel fret work of equal temperament tuning. It's a complex subject, though, and you'll need to understand conventional fretting first.

Enlighten us, then.
Well, as you know, an open bass string sounds a note. If you halve the length of that string, you'll get the same note an octave higher—in other words, 12 frets or 12 semitones higher. However, to play a second octave up—or 24 frets/semitones—you need to halve the string length from the 12th semitone to the bridge, a distance which covers only a quarter of the entire string length. Since we need to squeeze 12 semitones in between each octave, you can see how the frets need to get closer together as we go up the neck.



DON'T FRET

Those metal bars explained

You're going to suggest that we tear the frets out, aren't you?
In a sense, yes. One option is to leave equal temperament alone and address other shortcomings first. This is where the 'fanned frets' system comes in. Tell me, have you ever looked inside a grand piano?

Of course not, you weirdo.
Well, you should. You'll see that the lower-frequency strings are much longer than the higher ones. This is a deliberate design decision which improves tone, volume, and clarity. It's the same on a fanned-fret bass like the Dingwall played by our friend Lee Sklar in the pic above: The low strings have longer scale lengths, while the higher strings have shorter ones. The frets 'fan out' due to the relative positions of each semitone up the neck

and the position of each individual bridge piece.

That bass looks hard to play. Are the benefits really worth the extra effort?

Yes. The varying scale lengths for each string help to balance the string-to-string tension across the bass, as well as permitting lighter-gauge strings to be used at lower tunings. And no, you'll spend less than 20 minutes adjusting to the fan fret layout.

Are there any other alternatives to equal temperament?

Yes—check out the famous True Temperament frets. Not only is equal temperament an imperfect system, but pitches at different points on the fretboard are slightly out of tune with



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



Photo: Mattisson Bass

each other. True Temperament fret positions (above) fix this by moving the fretwire closer to the actual pitch, causing the fret to be curved. String bending isn't affected, apparently. You can find True Temperament frets on Strandberg and Mattisson basses.

That looks a bit scary.
Well, we're not finished yet. There's also the 'Just Intonation' fretting system. Have you ever noticed that some of the harmonics you play don't line up with the frets on your bass neck? The Just Intonation system, rather than using a complex mathematical equation to place the frets according to equal temperament, uses the harmonic nodes—or the harmonic locations on the strings—across the neck to place each fret. Chords sound lush and precise with this system, although special care needs to be taken with note choices, especially if you're playing with other instruments.

All this is highly confusing.
Well, we're all human, and we're all on a quest towards perfection. Besides, no-one ever learned anything new by simply accepting the norm, right? ■



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