

FENDER METEORA PLAYER+

First review of the new M-Bass



PJB NANOBASS COMBO

Wizardry from Phil Jones Bass

bassplayer

KHRUAN GIBIN'S
LAURA

“

*I don't know
everything...
but I bring
something
awesome.*

”

*Their name
is hard to
pronounce.
Their music is
hard to describe.
Their bass player
is a star.*

✦ *Bonus questions
from our guest
interviewer: FLEA*

PLUS!

**NIKKI SIXX,
MÖTLEY CRÜE**

*“People say I’m not a
real bass player.”*

**BASSBABA
SUMON**

*Bangladeshi
bass pioneer*

DAVE YOUNG

Jazzin’ with Oscar







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WELCOME



Meet Laura Lee: a mystery inside an enigma, as well as a unique bassist.

When I first heard the music of Khruangbin, recommended to me by the editor of *BP*'s sister magazine *Guitarist*, I wasn't sure what I was hearing—but I knew it sounded good.

At the heart of Khruangbin's strangely compelling blend of musical genres was a bass player of astounding economy and taste: a perfect candidate for your attention as the cover star of this magazine, then. Laura Lee isn't only a musical force to be reckoned with, either: She's an artistic visionary whose revealing interview tells us much about the dynamics of being in a successful, but resolutely non-mainstream, band.

As usual, we don't discriminate between musical genres in *Bass Player*. We enter classic Hollywood metal territory in a deep chat with Nikki Sixx of Mötley Crüe, we enter the jazz world with the great Dave Young, and we head to Bangladesh to explore the world of Bassbaba Sumon, who has stared down obstacles that would leave most of us collapsed in the corner of the studio.

With those and many more bassist interviews to absorb and enjoy, this is a packed issue even before we get to the gear reviews. Here, we encounter the biggest of all bass brands with the new Meteora bass from Fender, before shaking hands with new guys Flattley and their tasty effects pedals. Whatever you do with bass, if it's interesting and serves a useful purpose, the doors of *Bass Player* are open to you. It's how our community works.

Stay healthy, keep working on your bass playing, and I'll see you next month!

Joel McIver, Editor



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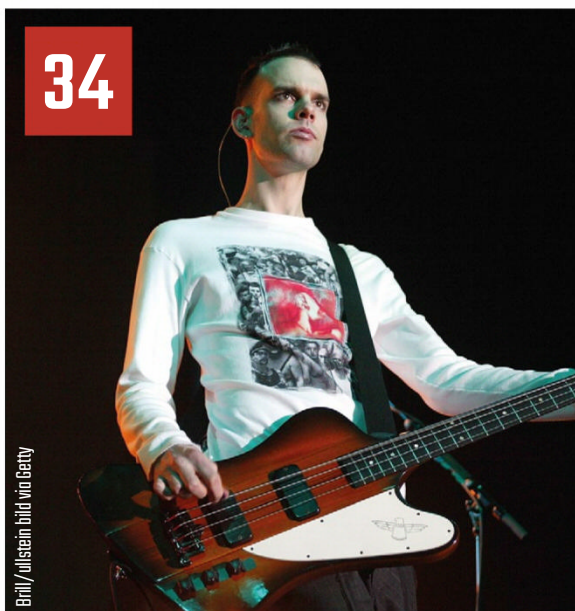
For most of his career, Mötley Crüe bassist Nikki Sixx has been faced with unjust accusations of being an unskilled bass player. Hywel Davies asks him why...

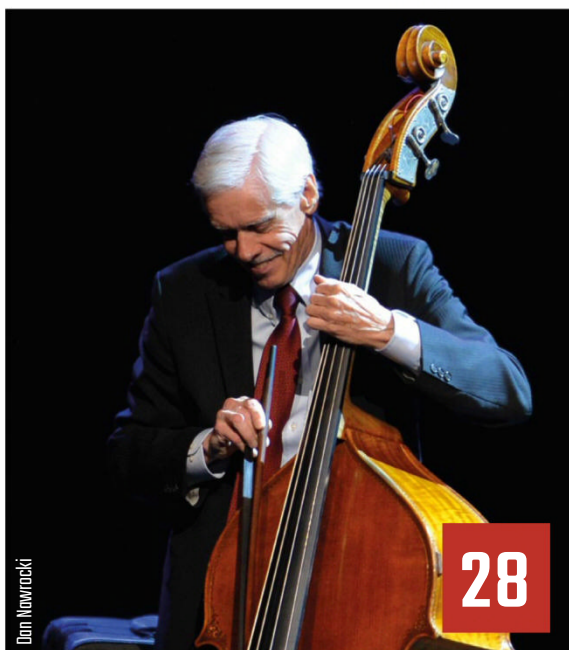
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bassplayer

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THE Lowdown

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

SLOW CHANGES

The Bass Extremes supergroup featuring **Victor Wooten** and **Steve Bailey** has an album on the way

Bass collaborations aren't just commonplace in our world, they're one of the key elements of our community—allowing us to fuse styles and approaches for the benefit of everyone. Such projects don't get bigger or better than Bass Extremes, a trio formed in 1992 by Victor Wooten, Steve Bailey, and the esteemed drummer Gregg Bissonette of Ringo Starr's All-Starr Band. The trio of Wooten, Bailey, and Bissonette recently completed a string of live dates, as well as announcing a new album.

The new release, *Slow Down*, celebrates 30 years of Bass Extremes and features a host of guests. These range from Bootsy Collins, Marcus Miller and Ron Carter via John Patitucci, Oteil Burbridge and Edgar Meyer to Billy Sheehan, Joe Dart, and Justin Chancellor. Wooten's long-time collaborator Béla Fleck plays bass banjo, and fusion guitarist Mike Stern switches to bass too, making the album a project to savour.

Just to remind ourselves: Wooten has won five Grammy awards and three *Bass Player* reader polls over the years. A prolific solo artist, he also runs popular bass camps and is the author of a novel, *The Music Lesson: A Spiritual Search for Growth Through Music*.

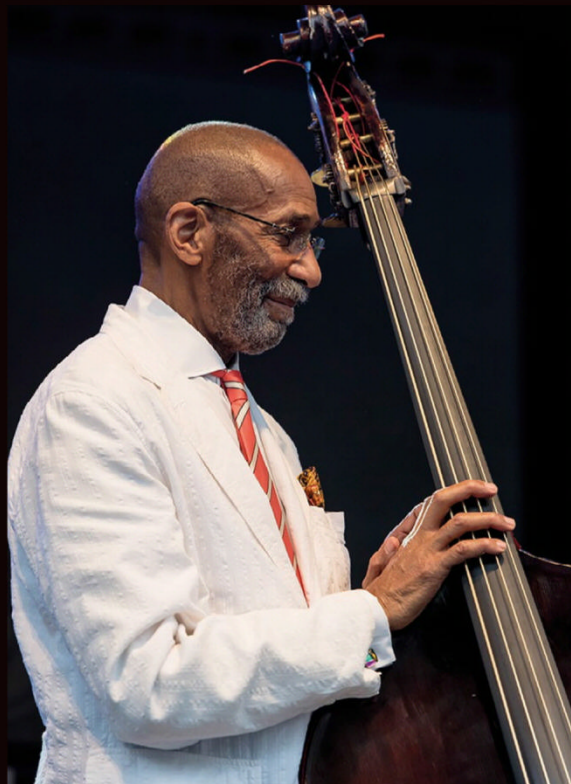
Bailey is a pioneer of the six-string fretless bass and has recorded widely, in collaboration with artists such as Dizzy Gillespie, Jethro Tull, Larry Carlton, and Willie Nelson, as well as releasing his own solo work. He currently holds the position of Chair of the Bass Department at Berklee College of Music in Boston. ■

Info: www.victorwooten.com/bass-extremes





© Taylor Hill/Getty



© Jack Vranjic/Getty



That's some guest list:
Oteil Burbridge, Ron Carter
and John Patitucci.

© Jack Vranjic/Getty



Strung Out

Jason Raso brings top talent to the table

The new album from Jason Raso, *Stringspan*, features guest appearances by Billy Sheehan, Stuart Hamm, BP writer Rich Brown, and Alain Caron.

"Some tracks were recorded as singles or for video projects," Raso explains. "Before I knew it, I had

close to 25 tracks. I narrowed it down to 15 and decided it was time to release a compilation. Recording my heroes Billy Sheehan and Stuart Hamm was a real highlight for me."



Bailey and Wooten in full,
groove-heavy flow

© Hironaka/Getty



Q Tips

Christian McBride releases a new EP

The venerated upright bassist Christian McBride recently issued *The Q Sessions* on digital platforms, having originally released it on the high-resolution streaming service Qobuz. Its three songs include a blues and a jazz standard, and a new song 'Brouhaha', written in tribute to the late Chick Corea. "The project was created with top-notch equipment at 24-bit/192kHz quality, and the final product streams and downloads with the exact same sound, tones, and touches in which it was first recorded," the company informs us. We're interested in whether the audio quality differs noticeably, so we'll be comparing the Qobuz and regular releases. ■



Talas Returns

Billy's classic band is back
Billy Sheehan recently announced that his first well-known band, Talas, has recorded a new album and single, their first new music in 37 years. 'Inner Mounting Flame' features vocals from Phil Naro, who passed away last year. Sheehan says: "We made it through hell and high water to get this record completed and released. 'Inner Mounting Flame' is a bombastic, high-speed chaos of adrenaline—this was such a blast to record, and Phil sang his ass off on it." ■

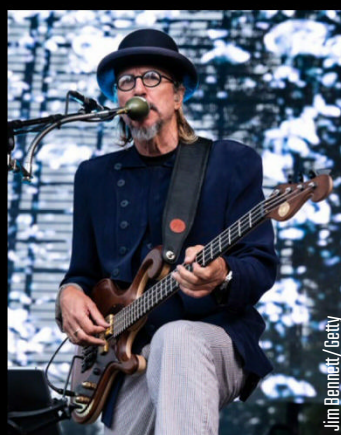
Funky Town

Thumbs aloft!

A veteran pair of funk-based acts will be returning to the stage and studio this year, with the legendary George Clinton resurrecting Parliament-Funkadelic for a run of summer shows and Primus releasing a new EP.

The former had decided to call it a day after touring in 2020, but Mr Clinton has apparently changed his mind, announcing a new set of dates that will cover the USA in funkified glory from June to August this year. Bass will be supplied by the great Lige Curry, whose excellent playing has been a feature of the P-Funk sound since 1978.

As for Primus, the cerebral alt-rock trio will be releasing a new, three track EP called *Conspiranoia*. One of the songs lasts 13 minutes, explains Les Claypool: "What I wanted to do was record one giant song. But you can't just release one song, so we recorded another song, but the first song was so giant that we had to do two [other] songs. So now we're doing a three-song single." ■



GEAR UP

Essential new basses and related products are on the way

There's plenty of desirable bass gear incoming in due course, kicking off with **Ernie Ball Music Man**, who have added limited-edition Spring 2022 models to their Ball Family Reserve collection with updated aesthetics and improved electronics. Watch out for an elegant short-scale StingRay bass, loaded with tortoiseshell block inlays and body binding. Featuring a 30" scale length and a single, higher-output neodymium magnet pickup, the downsized

four-string is now available in black, having previously only been available in Dropped Copper, Daphne Blue and Olympic White. From the same company, **Sterling by Music Man** have dressed their four- and five-string Ray34 and Ray35 models in some pretty stunning finishes, including a new-for-2022 Amber.

Meanwhile, the pickup specialists **Lollar** have sought to capitalize on the Fender Bass VI's resurgent popularity by unveiling an all-new set of Bass VI pickups. Partly due to the Beatles' recent *Get Back* documentary—which, among a wealth of juicy gear, gave

John Lennon's Fender VI some high-profile exposure – the Big F's cult classic model from 1961 has shot up in popularity in recent months.

It's a resurgence that has been noted by Lollar, whose latest offering promises to make "Fender's most unique instrument more usable for a wider range of play styles". The result of meticulous development, the Lollar Bass VI pickups are said to offer a broader and fuller EQ. They can be

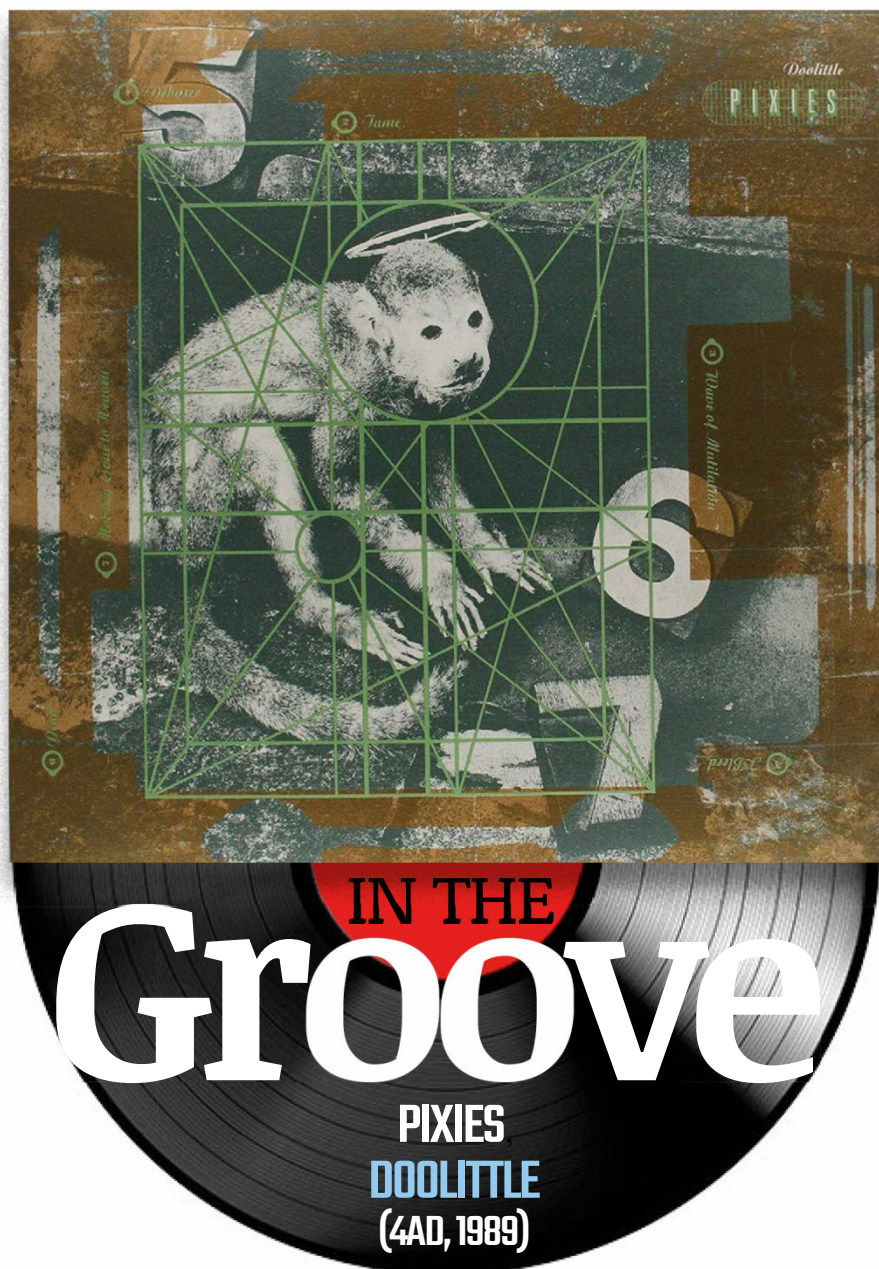
purchased as individual items, starting from \$130, or as three-piece bundles.

Line 6 has introduced the DL4 MkII,

a revamped iteration of its iconic DL4 delay pedal that hauls the 1999-dated original into the modern era by way of some neat aesthetic and tonal modifications. Under the hood, the DL4 MkII features 15 new delay types, all drawn from the HX family of effects processors, as well as the 15 original delay models that can be found on the flagship DL4—so, 30 delay types in all. Examples of the reverbs include Room, Double Tank, Plate, and Cave. ■

The Beatles' Get Back documentary has given Fender's Bass VI some high-profile exposure





Kim Deal: perfectly at home in studio or on stage

Let's dig out a bass-heavy LP from the vault. This month: Pixies' masterpiece *Doolittle*

It was often said of the Velvet Underground that few people saw them at the time, but everyone who did subsequently formed a band. Similarly, the number of famous musicians claiming to have been in the audience at the Sex Pistols' 1976 Lesser Free Trade Hall is up to several thousand by now—rather than the 40 or so that did turn up. For a while back in the Eighties, Pixies were firmly in the category of influential, underground cult band, too.

Signed to the achingly cool 4AD label, their debut EP *Come On Pilgrim* launched them as a noisy, bilingual alt-rock band that did away with pretension and embraced melody. At any stage, frontman and main songwriter Frank 'Black Francis' Black was prone to either sing sweetly or scream for the ages, with guitarist Joey Santiago, drummer Dave Lovering and, crucially, bassist Kim Deal providing the tight rhythms. It was alchemy—and the band's 1988 LP *Surfer Rosa* set things up stupendously for the following year's career highlight, *Doolittle*.

Deal's steady, rolling bass riffs on the record are played on a 1962 Fender Precision, which is full where it needs to be, and growly where it can be, but always anchoring the songs. Take 'Hey' as an example:

it's a simple, slightly syncopated bass-line which allows huge amounts of space to ramp up the drama of the track. No need for frills here—this is pure organic modern, intelligent punk rock. 'Debaser', Black's ode to Luis Buñuel's surrealist movie *Un Chien Andalou*, is similarly restrained, with a timeless rock arrangement and a solid rhythm section, with an insistent catchy lead guitar line, and those unmistakable Francis pipes on top. Here, you can find Deal's deadpan backing vocals as she simply repeats the title of the song.

It was in the live arena that Deal stood out: Her enormous joy at being in the musical moment was obvious, and her beaming smiles were expressive of the effervescence of her performance. A pick player, she's been enamored of green Dunlops for many a year and these days uses picks with her name on them.

As well as being an incredible record, produced by Gil Norton,

***Doolittle* invented grunge, and Kim Deal's bass proved crucial to the sound of that musical revolution**

Doolittle was to have a much wider influence on music. Songs like 'Wave Of Mutilation' and the hit single 'Monkey Gone To Heaven' showcased a form that Pixies made their signature. Verses were delivered with barely restrained vocals, and choruses let loose with full fuzz—or, as a 2006 film about the band's 2004 reunion put it: loud-QUIET-loud.

This deliberately dramatic dynamic spread around the globe in the early Nineties, when a previously-underground Seattle band had a hit with a song which even their lead singer admitted was a Pixies pastiche. That single was 'Smells Like Teen Spirit', and the band was called Nirvana. *Doolittle*, then, was the album that invented grunge, and Kim Deal's bass proved crucial to the sound of that musical revolution. ■

The Albums That Made Me



Richard Jones

The Stereophonics bassist looks back at five albums from his 25-year career. It's a journey through the low end...

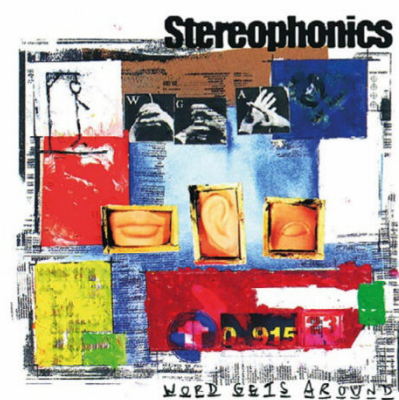
Straight outta Cwmaman in the mid-late Nineties came Stereophonics, a rock band that hammered out tales of small-town life while exploding with riffs and energy. Bassist Richard Jones—no relation to vocalist Kelly Jones—could barely play the bass when he joined the band, although he quickly found his chops courtesy of his first instrument, a Hohner fretless. That bass inspired Jones to play fingerstyle, homing in on intonation and comfort as well

as timbre, although he often uses a surprisingly hefty plectrum.

The band's 1997 debut album, *Word Gets Around*, was released on the back of a host of demo recordings for different labels, the group having honed their sound over several years of live performances in and around the South Wales area. Their latest album, *Oochya!*, stemmed from a planned 25th anniversary compilation, but realizing that they had a swathe of unreleased ideas, and new ones to boot, the

Stereophonics decided to pivot to a full-length brand-new LP and subsequent arena tour. Amazingly, it's their twelfth studio album, and it's still got the fizzing rock approach that made the band such a force in their earliest days.

We caught up with Richard to chat about signing to non-existent labels, how to retain spontaneity in recording sessions, and the bass-line with which Richard has tormented his lead singer over two and a half decades in rock. ■



Word Gets Around (1997)

"We made the songs as tight as possible."

"We'd been back and forth to London in [late drummer] Stuart Cable's yellow ex-BT van for four weeks of meetings, and then signed with V2. Basically they didn't have a record company, just an office within Richard Branson's house near Holland Park. They said, 'Go off, do some shows, and by the time you come back from that small tour, we'll have a record company for you to work with'. And that started everything for Stereophonics. We had all the songs, already developed through gigging for the previous few years, so it was just a matter of capturing the performance. Marshall Bird and Steve Bush, the producers, wanted to get the energy we'd had when they saw us live. It was basically the three of us in a room getting the backing tracks done and then tweaking it, or doing a couple of overdubs for the guitars. You know, if I made a mistake on a song we'd drop in for that, but basically it was all live. 'A Thousand Trees' was probably the oldest song in the repertoire, but we wrote lots and lots of songs, making sure we got them as tight as possible. We were using the gear we'd gathered from doing the pubs and clubs, and I'd saved up to get a wine-colored American Fender Jazz—with money I'd got from doing jury service!"



Performance And Cocktails (1999)

“Everyone wanted a piece of us...”

“Pretty much all of this was written while we were touring. Kelly would be writing on the tourbus, then we’d jam it out in the soundchecks. It was still very hectic, so whenever we could, whenever we came off the road we’d start recording new tunes. We recorded a lot of it at Real World Studios in Bath and we thought we’d be a little more savvy, as we’d been in lots of different studios for *Word Gets Around*. I got myself a Music Man Stingray as a spare because it had a three-band EQ, but it was a bit topsey live, so I swapped the pickups out for Jazz ones. Queens Music in Cardiff did the pickup switch for me, and then when I got more instruments a couple of years later I gave it back to them as a nice gift. It was almost like whenever you get a little bit of notice as a band, certain companies start throwing gear at you. I started using Ampegs then, because they were the industry standard: Wherever we went in the world, somebody could supply exactly that cab and we didn’t have to ship it ourselves. It just made total sense to start using different things. The album went to Number One, MTV started plugging ‘The Bartender And The Thief’ and we were doing videos in Italy, Thailand, America—everyone wanted a piece of us.”



Graffiti On The Train (2013)

“We left our label and did it our way.”

“We had gone through a little bit of rigmarole with record companies, and at the time V2 was sold to Universal. They’d put us on a label that they thought would suit us, but it wasn’t a great match. No disrespect to the people working there—they were all fantastic – but we felt like we were being lumped in with everybody else, like a commodity. So we decided to leave the record label and do it our way, and by the end of the process we’d written enough for a double album; Kelly wrote a screenplay for a movie we were hoping to make as well, and it was going to be a big relaunch of the band. We were using orchestras and it was a really, really creative time. I remembered that Jeff Ament from Pearl Jam was using SWR amps, so I asked the company if I could try some, which I used for about five years. For me, bass has always been about playing whatever suits the song, not necessarily trying to squeeze everything into it—something that enhances the melody and enhances the song. I used a Fender Jazz Deluxe on here, along with my ’74 P-Bass. It does exactly what it says on the tin. Every producer, every engineer—wherever I go they can plug it straight into the desk. That’s the one.”



Kind (2019)

“I wanted to be very spontaneous.”

“The lyrical content and songwriting from Kelly was a lot more introspective this time. From a playing point of view, I didn’t want any preconceived ideas, even though he’d sent me guitar demos. I learned the keys the songs were in, and their structure, then went into the session almost blind. I wanted to do everything there and then, and to be very spontaneous with the emotion of the song. We did 10 songs in about two weeks: Our sessions are always quick, and again we try and do everything live as a band. We mainly try to get the rhythm tracks nailed within two or three takes. As soon as you go over that, you start to lose the energy and spontaneity. It can get a little bit stale, almost like painting with numbers. Strings-wise, when it comes to the softer-sounding songs I use roundwounds, and the 1974 P-bass has 105s to 45s: I’ve never had any issues with them. Before that I used to get a lot of breakages: I don’t know if that was because the gigs were really high energy, but these are rock solid. I play a tiny bit of fretless on some songs, and I’ve got flatwounds on there. Pick-wise, I’ve got a one-millimetre Tortex. I find anything thinner just bends and slips out of my fingers.”



Oochya! (2022)

“A sense of satisfaction after every song.”

“When everything went on lockdown we got our own studio, but weren’t sure if we could get in there and record together, and we didn’t want to do it remotely, so 2020 was a write-off. Kelly got a new bunch of new demos together, and we had about two weeks in Ramsbury Brewery and Distillery Studio: We just managed to knock it out down there. It really did go down to the wire: We didn’t know at the time that the studio was going to be ripped out and moved 10 miles up the road. We cracked on, belting everything out, and nailed the rhythm tracks down within a couple of days. After every song is recorded you get a sense of satisfaction, because you’ve created something, and everyone is happy with it. Just to be together as a band was really nice because we hadn’t seen each other for a year at that point. I’ve been probably getting on Kelly’s nerves for 20 years, playing ‘Walk On The Wild Side’, so I wrote a similar line for ‘Leave The Lights On’. Another song, and a slow-builder, is ‘Every Dog Has His Day’. I introduce the bass very gradually around the 12th to 15th frets, nice and gentle, then fall into the lower register when the song gets bigger. Our first single, ‘Hanging On Your Hinges’ is a tribute to all the metal bands we listened to as teenagers.”

THE Lowdown

I WAS THERE!

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

You think you know what real rock'n'roll behavior is? Fifty years ago, **P-Funk** were busy redefining the concept.

“You have to imagine kind of like an orgy scene,” Bootsy Collins told *The Guardian* back in 2011. “Imagine a lot of chicks and people walking around naked—people doing the wild thing everywhere. Everyone’s taking LSD, smoking weed, no-one is scared of doing anything. Whatever you can think of, do it! And it was like that before the gig, on the way to the gig, during the gig and after the gig. Truly, the freak show never ended. I took LSD every day for two years, right up until the point I began feeling like I was living in another world.”

Having worked with James Brown, of whose band he was a member in 1970 to '71, Bootsy then played with House Guests before really finding his groove with George Clinton's band Funkadelic, playing on their fourth album, *America Eats Its Young* (1972). It was here that things really got crazy: As he recalled, “One night this chick gave us all Purple Haze acid, and everyone on stage was turning into giants and butterflies, it was so beautiful! We were playing so well that we didn't notice that the lights had come on and everyone had gone home. We were playing to an empty room.”

The last time we asked Bootsy about his experience of taking acid, he looked at the drug in more utilitarian terms, saying: “It expanded my whole thinking, as far as being creative in writing, and making me realize that I was more a part of the groove than I thought... but we had other things to worry about. I knew better than to take it, but James Brown kind of pushed me to that point, and when I did, I don't even remember what happened. I knew that that wouldn't work for me, taking it to groove with James. That definitely wouldn't work.” ■

© All images Michael Ochs Archives/Getty



The god of funk himself.



George Clinton: The P-Funk leader.



Imagine the scenes inside the Mothership.

Hello bassists! Let's talk DI, or direct injection/ input, boxes. Some of you will know them well, from studio or live use; for others, these may be new territory, merely viewed as those strange little boxes you're plugged through at gigs. Either way, I'll be filling in the blanks to give you a greater understanding of these signal allies, and how we can best utilize them in our signal chain to provide a capture of sound appropriate for our live setting.

According to Radial Engineering's website, "The primary function of a direct box is to convert the unbalanced high-impedance signal from an instrument to a balanced low-impedance signal that is compatible with a PA or recording system", and they should know. In most live circumstances, we won't simply be relying on the output of our amplifiers, as they're often unable to provide the required volume needed to fill a venue.

USE DI BOXES CORRECTLY

The benefits of going direct

There's also a cohesion of sound that's achieved when all instruments are put through the PA, so it becomes a necessity as part of our signal routing.

A DI box will usually have an 'input' where the bass is connected, a 'through' which goes to the amp, and an 'XLR out' which goes to the front-of-house desk. There are many different types and manufacturers of DI box, each of which color your bass tone differently, so I won't make recommendations for specific DIs when tone is so individually subjective. However, there are a few things to be aware of when you communicate your preferred sound to front of house.

The main thing to bear in mind is at what point in your signal chain you connect the DI box. If you plug your bass straight into the DI box and then the 'through' out to your amplifier, the bass sound coming out of the PA will be your dry bass signal. This tends to be beneficial for those who are happy to put their tone in the hands of the FOH engineer, as it enables them maximum flexibility when they adjust it.

Alternatively, you could plug your bass into your pedalboard and then into the DI before going to the amp, which would also send your effected sounds to the PA. This is ideal for those who do not feel that the tonal



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



BIMM INSTITUTE

coloration of the amplifier is necessary for the FOH sound, and are using effects.

Finally, some amplifiers will have an XLR line out on the back, with a post/pre switch. You could connect your DI box here: If set to 'post', it will also send the tonal flavor of the amplifier to the PA. This is perfect for those whose tone is made up of everything from their bass to their pedals to their amp. ■

The Woodshed

WHAT'S YOUR ANGLE?

Head over to the top end of your bass

Headstocks: Some are flat, some tilt backward, some even twist. While providing a convenient masthead for manufacturers, the headstock of a guitar also performs some useful functions beyond broadcasting brand identity. Headstocks are certainly a handy place to install tuning machines, and they also provide mass which can influence an instrument's performance—but what's the deal with headstock angles?

The most common types of headstocks found on bass guitars are the flat Fender type, and tilted and angled headstocks. The former are the most economical to produce, and are common on lower-priced instruments where specifications are often determined by a manufacturing budget. They are also found on some higher-priced instruments that imitate classic designs, or which incorporate 'traditional' features.

However, flat-type headstocks do not generally provide enough break angle for the strings to make a positive contact with a nut—or zero fret—that is required to deliver optimal open-string performance. To achieve a steeper break angle, the addition of devices known as 'string trees' is required. Some instruments with flat headstocks also utilize tuning keys with tapered posts which force the strings to wrap downward, toward the bottom of the post, to maintain the steepest possible break angle from the nut.

The construction of an angled headstock requires both additional time and material, resulting in higher manufacturing costs—but angled headstocks contribute more than just additional overhead. Adding a break angle to the headstock itself places the tuning pegs below the plane of the fretboard. This placement affords enough positive string pressure at the nut or zero fret to eliminate any need for string trees. Some angled headstocks have a relatively shallow pitch, just enough to resolve the need for these trees, while some instrument designs incorporate



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

steeper headstock angles in order to increase overall string tension.

Flat or angled, the odds are pretty good that your bass has a headstock. Take some time to compare how the different type of headstocks on your basses influence their performance and playability. In the event that you own one of the growing number of basses with no headstock at all, be sure to compare how the loss of headstock mass changes the performance of the bass, and how its elimination affects string tension and playability. ■



Joe Hubbard takes us through ways to exploit this useful theory

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Groove is largely defined by our understanding of rhythm and time, while the concept of feel is defined by our understanding of stylistic variation. A great exercise to work on is called rhythmic displacement. What I'm going to do is take an eighth-note pattern and play it in two ways: First very short, or staccato, and then secondly playing the notes to their full duration, which is known as tenuto.

I'm then going to displace that pattern by one 16th note. The pattern is now going to be falling on the (e) and the (ah) of every quarter note, which is the second and fourth 16th notes of each beat. What I find really interesting is how the short articulation results in straight 16th notes, while the long articulation represents the same pattern – but this time with ties, once the straight eighth note patterns are displaced.

The key elements to improvisation are rhythm, melody and harmony. What I've found over the years as a teacher is that the vast majority of all the bass players I've taught are not aware of what they're playing rhythmically. A lot of it seems to be left to chance, with very little understanding of where the pulse is, what subdivisions are being played, how many bars they are playing, and how to manipulate rhythmic phrases to create interest and connection to the music they are playing.

Working on exercises like this will enable you to get inside of your groove concepts and almost instantaneously position you to level up your bass skills. Until next time—practice smart, work hard, and play creatively!

EXERCISE 1

As you can see in the first half of this exercise (1A), we're playing straight eighth notes that all have dots placed over them. This is highlighting that all the notes should be played short in duration. In contrast, notice in the second half of this drill (1B), there are straight horizontal lines above each note, pointing out that the notes should be played long to their full duration. Set your metronome to 80bpm and practice transitioning between these two variations.

EXERCISE 2

In this exercise, we're shifting exercise 1A by a 16th note forward, which creates rhythmic

EXERCISE ONE A

EXERCISE ONE B

EXERCISE TWO

EXERCISE THREE

displacement. Whereas in exercise 1A, we were accenting the notes on the downbeat and upbeat of every quarter note, in this exercise we're placing the notes on the (e) and the (ah) of every beat. Make sure to count out loud as you practice this exercise.

EXERCISE 3

Notice how in this exercise, the notes are tied into where the rests existed in Exercise 2. This

gives us the same rhythmic displacement but enables the notes to be held longer, as in Exercise 1B. This is a subtle difference, with the emphasis shifted one 16th note forward: It can be difficult to hear, so practice slowly at first. What you'll find is that all these exercises are a great way to get you more closely connected with rhythm, time and groove—and ultimately enable you to feel what you play. ■





"We design the sets to build up and leave you on a high."

THE LEE WAY

The hottest new band in years is Khruangbin, the Texas-based trio whose music stretches from dub via country to cinematic soundscapes and beyond. Anchoring the band philosophically and musically, bassist **Laura Lee** has wisdom for us all about making a band work while basing it on a solid set of ethics.

Interview: Ryan Madora **Photography:** Jackie Lee Young / Getty

Let's face it, you'd never expect a mostly instrumental trio who play wilfully uncommercial music to enjoy millions of Spotify plays, over 20 million views of a live stream, slots at major festivals, and regular shows at large venues. The Texan three-piece Khruangbin have done just that, though, earning props from artists such as Flea—a huge fan of their bass player. What's more, Khruangbin are a *real band*.

These days, we live in a world where solo artists reign supreme. If you play bass, you'll likely be a side player, hired gun, or weekend warrior. The notion of playing music and going on adventures with your best friends will quickly dissipate, replaced by the realization that what we bring to the table is limited and dictated by whoever hired us. As we learn to accept this, we'll stand under bright stage lights while simultaneously living in the shadows.

Unless, of course, you're Laura Lee, aka 'Leezy'. She's one of the lucky ones. She's got herself a band.

Hailing from Houston, Texas, the musical trio known as Khruangbin has spent the past decade making records, playing sold-out shows, and reminding the world of what it's like to be in a band. The brainchild of guitarist Mark Speer, drummer 'DJ' Johnson Jr., and bassist Lee, Khruangbin's music is built from the bottom up. Steady drum beats, trance-inducing bass-lines and melodic guitar riffs reflect diverse musical influences from around the world. Their live show features neon lighting and giant disco balls, a drum kit nestled in an elevated spaceship, and three distinctive characters who move about the stage while the audience sways back and forth. It's a carefully curated scene that speaks to both the aural and visual aesthetic.

Believe it or not, when Leezy steps on stage, she's still using her first bass. "My main bass is an SX J-Bass that I got in college. Mark got it for me and changed the pickups to DiMarzio humbuckers. It's a pretty standard knock-off Jazz and the headstock still looks like a Fender headstock. My back-up bass is a knock-off Hofner Beatles bass, a hollow-body short scale. If my main bass fails me for whatever reason, the backup is actually easier to play than my main one."

Since the studio may require something different, Lee might grab something a bit unconventional. "I also have a Fender Bass VI, which is kind of an unloved, underappreciated bass," she says. "That bass has a chunky midrange sound that I really like. My favorite bass tone is from the era of Serge Gainsbourg. Whoever was playing bass on the *Jane Birkin/Serge Gainsbourg* LP [1969] had a very peanut-buttery sounding tone. I've been trying to get that tone my whole life, and I do my best on the J-Bass. I noticed that tone when I played a VI for the first time. I also might play a P-Bass in the studio if I want that earthquakey boom—and I play flatwound strings and haven't changed them in 12 years. That's my thing!"

Playing in a trio can create certain challenges from a tone standpoint, so amps, effects and DIs come into play. "On stage, I play through a Fender Bassman 10, which is more of a midrange-sounding amp. It's not usually used for bass, and I would always confuse sound engineers when we started out because I would ask them to cut the lows. I also use the Simplifier Bass Station. I like to hear the high end of my fingers on stage, and it gives more definition. Because there's only three of us, the interplay between the bass and guitar is so important. If the sound of my bass is too muddy or too big, you can't hear the interplay as much. I have a compressor that we've switched up a few times because I tend to play really hard when I'm playing live. I go through

the Motown DI and I bring that in the studio with me as well."

Khruangbin puts a lot of thought into the creation of their live performance, especially when it comes to improvising and creating dynamic moments. "We start with the framework of crafting a show," Lee explains. "There are certain songs that have stretchable parts, where one or all of us could improvise, and it's usually Mark who does that. Within the three of us, he's really the singer, so to speak, with his guitar. DJ and I spend a lot of time

building his improvisations up and down, depending on the energy. It's improvisational but more supportive."

In between songs like 'White Gloves' or 'Maria Tambien', the band strings together eclectic medleys comprised of classic

pop themes and hip-hop grooves. "When we play medleys, they're very specific and crafted, but the improvisation will sometimes come during soundcheck when one of us plays a song and we learn how to insert it. So, in a show, we might be playing it for the first or second time. A lot of the structure comes from this evolving, breathing, and sometimes

✦
"I hope people experience some sort of out-of-body rollercoaster emotion at our shows"

"A show is like church."





Lee in the zone, with guitarist Mark Speer.

© Jim Bennett/Getty Images

improvisational place. You have to let the song do what it wants to do—and you know what that is when you’re in it.”

When asked about the audience, Lee has high hopes for what people take away from a show. “I hope people feel like they got slapped in the face in the best way possible. I really want to be impactful so they really feel something. Every song we write conveys some sort of emotion, and we design the sets to build up and leave you on a high. The band itself is a representation of people coming together to make music. Our shows have people from different walks of life that come together to experience 90-plus minutes of music, and I hope that they feel the power of what that means when they leave. I hope they get so sucked into the show that they experience some sort of out-of-body rollercoaster emotion and leave with a bunch of other humans that felt the same thing.”

Surely that would happen after performing at Nashville’s Ryman Auditorium, also known as the ‘Mother Church of Country Music’. Lee chimes in, saying, “Yeah, because a show is like church. It’s about the same amount of time, it’s people coming together who believe in the same thing to some degree, and hopefully they leave feeling lifted. If the Ryman is church, then I’m hoping to have a spiritual experience.”

Recording is quite an ordeal for the band. They convert a dirt floor barn in the middle of nowhere into a fully functioning recording studio. “It’s a mission,” she says. “We don’t just pop over to the barn and play—it’s a pilgrimage with three U-Hauls. We bring gobos [acoustic panels] to try to have some isolation,

but we’re never going to get really isolated sound: We like the bleed and what the bleed does. It’s magical out there, and you’re away from everything. There’s barely phone service or wi-fi, so it’s a place where we can really dig in and get deep into our heads.

“When we get there, we might have a few ideas or bass-lines crafted, but not fully-formed songs. We use the isolation and the time together to be able to build. It’s just simplicity and using limitations to our advantage. The barn is so much effort, and there are difficult natural elements that come into play, but it does whittle things down to bass, drums, guitar, and space.”

This method certainly stimulates the creative process, but Lee brings something particularly special to the table. “My contribution is my naivety, in a really beautiful way. When we first started playing, I was really hard on myself and really nervous, and I still feel like an imposter most of the time. Mark and DJ have been playing since they were tiny and they know their instruments so much more in-depth than I do. On the flipside, I come at it without worrying about all of the stuff that you think about if you’re someone that knows everything.

“Mark gave me the book *Zen Guitar* [by Philip Toshio Sudo], which I highly recommend to anybody, even if you don’t play guitar. It’s a really beautiful way to think about any hobby or creative process. Your white belt is just as important as your black belt. You’re not thinking outside of the box, you’re just thinking—but to an advanced player, it might feel like you’re thinking outside of the box, because it might be simpler than something they could ever think of.



MEETING OF MINDS

We asked Flea, a huge fan of Laura Lee, to ask her some questions about her low-end philosophy...

Flea: Your bass-lines are so beautiful and hypnotic. How do you know when a line is ready?

Laura: I tend to write lines designed to loop—so when the end of the line wants to go back to the beginning, it signals completion.

Flea: How do the movements of your body relate to your bass playing?

Laura: It's everything. There's a reason certain music makes you want to bang your head up and down, or push your head front and back like a duck, or jump... I like keeping time with my hips or my knees, which influences how I deliver it on stage. In my head, if what I'm playing makes me dip my hips low, then the groove is strong and it helps me deliver the song how I feel it in my head.

Flea: What do you yearn for as a bass player?

Laura: Connection. I'm a feeling machine. More than anything, I want to emote and connect to the people yearning to feel that same thing—whatever it is. It can be painful, fun, haunted; the list goes on. I feel like when it comes to writing, I'm digging to the deepest depths of my emotional well, releasing it and hoping when people hear it, they feel impacted. PS: I love you, Flea. Really and truly, it is an honor to be your friend.

"What you can create in a band is so much bigger than you are."

Mark will look at the guitar and see infinite possibilities. I still look at the bass without that.

"I'm still going to pentatonics, because that's what feels good to me. When I play around with little variations outside of that, it's me expanding rather than feeling like I know the world. I'm still discovering the world. So, I think my contribution is the playfulness of a child. I'm really proud of that now, and it used to be something that I was really insecure about. Now, that's me—I'm going to be the person that doesn't know everything and I'll bring something awesome because I don't know."

Taking time to experiment and explore is the hallmark of how they compose new material. Laura mentions that "Mark will find snippets of things to bring into the recording process. He has me play to a drum loop for hours and I usually go somewhere by myself, without anybody watching, so I don't have the pressure of someone seeing what I'm coming up with. He makes me promise that I'm not going to edit it or delete anything that I don't like, because they might like them. And DJ loves my mistakes; he says that I make the greatest mistakes in the world, and these mistakes stay on the record."

Laura is keenly aware of how unique it is to feel comfortable, accepted, and supported within the context of the band. "In *Zen Guitar*, there's a chapter about forming a band and the relationships and dynamics of it. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. You can have a supergroup of all equally amazing, talented humans and it just does not work. It was very clear to me early on that the three of us just really worked. We were friends for so long before we started the band, and our friendship existed outside of all other friendships. We didn't hang out all together with groups of people, it was just the three of us. Our friendship leads the whole thing; it's like we're all married."

"It makes me emotional thinking about it, because I realize, especially when I see festival line-ups that we're on, that there are no more bands. There are solo artists and they tour with a band, but the dynamic of what a band can represent for people can be so much greater. Still, it's a money-driven society and it's expensive to be in a band. It's much cheaper to be a DJ or a solo artist, and it's also much less complicated. When we're working with labels, for example, we have to reach an opinion that all three of us agree with. As a solo artist, it's much easier to find that thing. For live performance, it's much easier to have a DJ come and play perfect songs with no mistakes, and they only travel with a USB stick or a bag of records—not with amps, gear, a front of house person, a monitor person, and everything that it takes to man a working operation. I'm a real champion and a believer in it. What you can create in a band is so much bigger than you are—and what you receive in the audience from watching a band is really powerful."

"Plus, the three of us each have our different, individual things that we bring to the table. You often don't realize that when you start a band, it's also

♦ **"I'm a big supporter of 'How can we lift up as many people as we can?' with our position as Khruangbin"**



a business, and you have to run it and manage a team. It's a big thing, and each of us play our parts."

Not just a commander of the groove, Laura takes pride in curating the visual aesthetic of the band. "It's so weird, because I went to school for architecture and then switched to art history, and I worked in museums for a while, but my goal was to work in curation, more than anything else. I find all of the poster artists and it's one of my personal projects within the band. I spend a lot of time searching before I go to bed, usually on Instagram or visual blogs that I follow, and I'll hound artists that speak to me in some way. I give them the brief of the show poster: I usually want Khruangbin as our characters to be represented. We have such strong visual identity as characters, and that has been an important aspect of our show and aesthetic. Even without the posters, what we look like

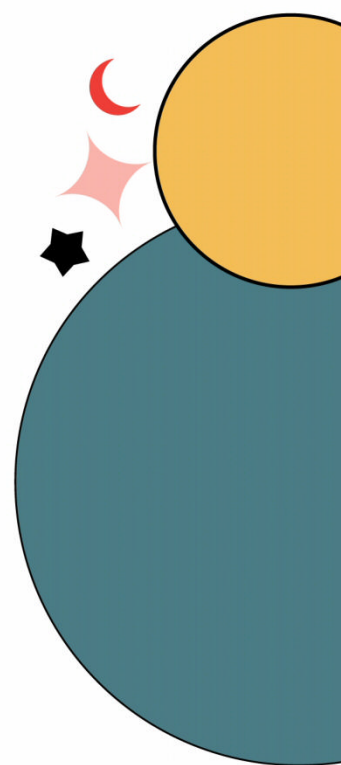
doesn't look like any other band. The posters also try to reference the city or venue we're playing, so that there's a shout-out to where we are. I think that even though every poster we have is from a different artist, you always

know it's a Khruangbin poster, because we've created a certain universe."

She also brings a lot to the team in terms of fashion and curating outfits. "It's in the same space as the poster art. I see myself in a position to champion young artists that might not have a name out there. I think with designers, it's the same. I tend to wear super-independent, young designers. Going back to *Zen Guitar*, in the way that you're following your creative path, the younger players or designers tend to be a little wilder because they haven't gotten to the point where they're pleasing people for their business. So, I'm a big supporter of 'How can we lift up as many people as we can?' with our position as Khruangbin."

One thing is for sure—Lee truly believes in creating the best possible art, and is on a mission to do so. "At the end of the day, I want to feel something from any kind of art. It's not about the artist having to have a specific style or working in a genre, it's about asking, 'Does it move me?' There are 12 notes—and it's about recontextualizing them in a way that makes them feel different." ■

Info: www.khruangbin.com





Sixx in 1984: note pinky behind the bridge, his signature move.

FÖREVER TWENTY-ONE

After 40 years and millions of album sales, **Nikki Sixx** of Mötley Crüe is still getting flak from certain quarters. “People say I’m not a real bass player,” he tells Hywel ‘Too Fast For Love’ Davies

There are few people alive who can truly boast the title of ‘rock star’, but Fred Feranna, otherwise known as the infamous Nikki Sixx, bassist and founding member of metal icons Mötley Crüe and Sixx:AM, is one such person. As well as being one of the most recognized bassists in rock, a best-selling author and photographer, Sixx has lived one of the loudest lives of any human in modern history.

Tales from this unique bassist’s life were graphically detailed in his previous memoir, *The Heroin Diaries*, in 2007. However, little is really known of his earlier years as a teenager and young adult before he hit it big with Mötley Crüe in 1981. Not any more, though. *The First 21: How I Became Nikki Sixx* is the real autobiography fans have been waiting for. It was released last year alongside his band Sixx:AM’s *Hits* album.

“I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but the book was written by Fred Feranna and Nikki Sixx, so it’s a little psychotic—but I like to have fun with it,” laughs Sixx when we ask him about the new book. “We moved to Wyoming a while back, and we have a lot of land and a big backdrop of the Teton mountain range; it’s something else. I grew up on the other side of those mountains in Idaho. I fell in love with music there, and when you find something you love, you can’t get enough of it, especially in those early years. I was out back looking over these mountains, and I just had this thought; it’s been 45 years since I was 17, back when I headed into the belly of the beast that was Hollywood.

“I’ve always been inspired by my surroundings and by things that I see. I always jot things down, whether it be lyrics, an idea for a short story or a poem. I just really like to write. Back in the Seventies, I would have original songs: The guys would say at auditions,

‘There’s no money in original music!’ but I didn’t care. That’s when I found out that I wasn’t a basic bassist who stuck to doing Top 40 music covers. I formed my own bands, I started writing my own songs and my own lyrics, and I wanted to share to the world that a small-town kid could make it in Hollywood. That’s where the book ends, just before Mötley Crüe.”

As Sixx conjures up old memories by replaying his life, even he’s a little surprised by his own antics. Rather than sweeping his misdemeanors under the rug, he embraces all parts of his life, bad haircuts and all.

“Yeah, there’s a lot of lessons in the book. There’s a lot of mistakes I made when I was a kid and young adult. There are parts in there that got me thinking that I really sound like a criminal,” he says. “Moving

from job to job, hustling door to door selling vacuum cleaners and all that, but I needed to pay for rehearsals and equipment. When I was in one of my earlier bands, London, we asked ourselves, ‘How are we going to make a small stage in a club

look like an arena show?’ That isn’t cheap, but when you’re young you could go days without eating.

“Every day was about practice,” he continues.

“Just practice, practice, practice, which is still one of my favorite things. When you’re at practice you don’t have big bombs going off, or lighting or video to worry about. You’re just standing in a circle, banging out the song, dusting off the bones, and getting the rust off. That’s my favorite feeling ever, man.”

Since we’re already down memory lane, does he remember his first steps into bass? “My mom had this boyfriend way back when. He had this old flamenco gut-string guitar which he gave me, but it only had three strings. He had these big speakers and he would be playing everything under the sun—Sly & The

**“There are a lot of lessons
in my book—and parts
where I really sound
like a criminal!”**

Family Stone, Led Zeppelin, Olivia Newton John, Kiss. I was just blown away, so when I got this guitar, I would be mapping out notes that I would hear—it was really interesting to me.

“I get grief sometimes from people who say, ‘Oh you’re not a real bass player because you’re not all over the place’, but I’m not like that,” he continues. “My job is to support the song and be super tight with my drummer. If there’s any room in there, I might throw in something melodic, but generally I stay in the pocket, which I believe has something to do with that three-string guitar. I want to take one note and I want to maximize it, like how John Lennon wrote ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’. The melody in that song is relatively simple, but it changes and grows, taking

you on a journey. I try to do that with our songs: To me, that’s so important.

“For me, there’s always been a barrier between being traditional and following rules,” he says. “I play guitar badly, and I’ve written songs that are just three chords but which sound interesting. I’ve learned to try and be nobody else but me, which comes right from that simplicity. In general, I like adding all the layers to a song and that’s really exciting—watching it turn into something bigger. I’m not one of those musicians who has a full-blown studio in their house, and finishes everything and give it to the band. With Sixx:AM, we’re all in a band, which means we’re all in this together. I’ll come up to them and have a few ideas and then we just go from there. That’s my process.”



With singer Vince Neil
in London in 2015.



How has he managed to stay creative after so long, we wonder? “It’s different for everybody,” he explains. “I always carry a notepad and a pencil or something to write on, and I always have a camera. I feel like I’m open all the time. Say for example, I’m watching TV and see something interesting, I’ll pick up my bass and be like, ‘What is that?’ and then it turns into an idea. I run with it and show the guys, who will say, ‘Yeah, that’s great—how about we try adding this?’ It all builds from there. If I write seven songs in a week, even if I don’t record them, I’ll just write them down. Not because it’s my job: I just like to create stuff. This is my life and I love it. My friends say to me, ‘Hey Nikki, are you always going to be doing this?’ And I’m like, ‘Yeah, I don’t know any other way.’

Sixx remains as much a student of bass as the next player. “I think it’s important to listen to the music which you like—and maybe listen to music that you didn’t grow up with. If you didn’t listen to ABBA, Led Zeppelin or hip-hop, opening your ears now to anything and just listening makes a world of difference. It doesn’t mean I’m going to be a rapper or anything, but I’m always curious about what these other creative people are doing that’s different. In my case I’m really clear in what I want, which was one of the problems I had with auditioning for those Top 40 cover bands back in the day.

“I remember this one audition: We’d break into ‘Cold As Ice’ by Foreigner, and the guy would be like, ‘You’re not playing it exactly like the record’. I didn’t even bother listening to the bass part before going in. My mentality was the song is in A, drops to D and it opens up on an F—what more do I need to know?

“I always got fired from covers bands because they were playing the songs exactly like they were on the record. That’s never been my thing”

I always got fired because those bands were playing the songs exactly like they were on the record. I wasn’t very good at doing cover songs. In Mötley Crüe we would do a few here and there, but in general we didn’t really do that. I don’t want to go into band rehearsal to be like ‘Learn this and learn that’. That’s never been my thing.”

There’s just one more thing we have to ask. If he could go back and sit face to face with his 21-year-old self, what would he tell Fred Feranna to do differently? “I feel if I could have done anything different, I wish I had gotten lessons when I was younger. It would have been one of the best things for me. I wish I could have had that kind of support musically, which I don’t

mean in a negative way.

People always ask me if they’re starting bass, what should they do, and my answer is always the same. Play to a metronome and take lessons.

“As a musician, you need to be in a position where you can go into any kind of session and fit in. When you take lessons, all the information is

right there,” he concludes. “I was taking lessons from this site called Scott’s Bass Lessons. I would go into the beginner’s section and I’d be like, ‘Okay sure, I know that, but what’s that interesting piece of information which I’ve never had?’ Then I’d wade through the more advanced stuff, and that’s where I started playing with my fingers more. I really enjoy that. I’m not sure I’ll be playing fingers with the band—but I enjoy it anyway.”

The First 21: How I Became Nikki Sixx and Sixx:AM’s Hits are out now.

Info: www.facebook.com/nikisixxofficial

 **Players**
BASSBABA SUMON



SUMON SAYS

How many bass players do you know who have survived multiple bouts of cancer, a near-fatal road accident, a stroke, and more than 30 surgeries, and are still performing at the top of their domestic music industry? Meet **Bassbaba Sumon** from Bangladesh

Interview: Joel McIver

Saidus Salehin Khaled, known as Bassbaba ('Bass Father') Sumon or just as BB, is a bassist, singer, songwriter, solo artist, and bandleader from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Known for his membership of the bands Feelings and Aurthohin, as well as many collaborations and solo releases, BB is renowned in his home country but less known in the West, where Bangladeshi rock music is seldom heard.

A bass player since the age of 13, when he was inspired to pick up the instrument by Steve Harris of Iron Maiden, BB began writing and recording in his mid-teens and was a solo and session performer by the age of 17. His first solo album was released when he was 20, and by the 2000s he was a member of the arena-rock band Aurthohin, which he continues to lead today. He was the first ever domestically-based Bangladeshi musician to receive a gear endorsement, in his case by MTD, and he's also on the roster at Boss, Roland, Temple Audio Design, Gruv Gear, Gallien-Krueger, Bartolini, and La Bella.

However, in the last decade BB's career has been seriously obstructed by a relentless sequence of health issues, which he discusses with us below. He's come through them all, as creative a bassist and performer as ever: There's a lesson there for all of us.

If you're comfortable with it, BB, please talk to us about the health problems you've had.

Sure. I was diagnosed with cancer back in 2012. First I had two tumors in my spine, but

that cancer was at a very early stage, so after the surgery I got better. Eighteen months later, I was diagnosed with stomach cancer, and this was really serious because it was at stage three and almost stage four. The doctors had to remove 85 percent of my stomach. After that, I had a brain tumor and they had to remove that, and after that, I got skin cancer: I had several tumors on my skin, so they had to remove those. Believe it or not, after that the stomach cancer came back, and they had to remove my whole stomach—so I've been fighting cancer for a long time. Now I have no cancer issues.

What happened then?

I got into a car accident, and my spine was totally fucked up—sorry for my language. The doctors put 14 screws in my spine, but those surgeries, which took place in Thailand and in Singapore, weren't successful. The first doctor put six screws in, then the second doctor put in another four screws, and then another two screws and so on: I was in very bad shape. But then I went to Germany, which is really good for this kind of surgery, and when the doctors over there saw my spine, they removed all the screws and put six more screws in again.

How did that affect you?

I could walk, and I could stand for a short time, but I couldn't sit, so I couldn't play bass for long. I couldn't record. I couldn't do

anything, so I was totally in bed for three and a half years. I couldn't play a bass while I was lying down, so I was totally off the grid for those years. I'm the singer, the songwriter and the composer of my band Aurthohin—which means 'meaningless' in Bengali—so we totally stopped our activities. For four years, we were nowhere. I was taking painkillers, and I got hooked on them. Because I was always in bed, lying down, I had a stroke. My left hand, my left leg and my left side were paralyzed for four to five months, so I had to do a lot of physiotherapy.

How badly was your bass-playing affected by your stroke?

I needed very serious rehabilitation to come back from that. I'm still practicing every day. Right now I'm at 80 percent of my ability, I think, because two of my fingers are still a little stiff. But eventually I'll get there. I know that, because a long time ago my jaw got dislocated in the middle of a concert while I was singing. In the middle of a song, I couldn't move my jaw, and I had to stop the concert and go to the hospital. In Bangladesh, the medical system is not that advanced, so the next day I went to Singapore, where they told me that my jaw ligament was not torn, but it had stretched, like elastic does. The doctor gave me a brace to wear on my mouth. He told me 'For the rest of your life, you have to put this on, and you cannot sing'. I told him, 'You'll see—I will sing someday'. And you know what, it took me 18 months to do it. I went back to the stage, and I was wearing that brace. Then I recorded an album wearing that thing. After three years, I threw it away. The doctor told me, 'I don't know how you did it. I've checked everything, and you're okay'. So I have this confidence that whatever

comes my way, I will overcome it.

“My comeback gig was in a stadium with 30,000 people there, all of them singing our songs”

When did you become fully healthy again?

Not for a long time.

After the stroke I had

a second brain tumor, but fortunately it was benign, and they removed it. The last thing was that I had a broken bone in my spine, which was in a very sensitive place. The doctors told me that they were not taking the risk of doing surgery, so they did some kind of electronic vibration therapy that moved the bone away from my spinal cord. Finally, I started my music career again. We did a comeback gig in a stadium with five more bands. There was something like 30,000 people there, and all of them were singing our songs—we didn't even have to sing. It was an amazing experience. We thought that people forgot us, but they didn't.

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★ Players

BASSBABA SUMON

What does that much suffering do to a person?

A doctor once told me that I might only have eight to 14 months left to live, when I had stage three cancer, and I was very scared. For two weeks, I never told anyone, even my family members, that I had cancer. I isolated myself, because I didn't know what to do, but one of my friends came to see me. She lived in the States, and she also had cancer: She has passed away since then. She told me, 'Live your life. Even if you only have eight months to 14 months, just live your life'. That changed me, and I made a bucket list. One of the items on that list was a road trip in the United States. I went to the States and I drove 10,000 miles.

How has your mental health been affected by your physical issues?

I never actually got depressed. I was sad, and sometimes I was frustrated, but I didn't get depressed. I thought 'Right now I'm going through a very bad phase, but that means that the good times are coming—I just have to be patient'. That's exactly what's happening. My agent is receiving at least 10 to 15 calls a day for our gigs.

Has all this made you stronger?

Absolutely. One thing I know is that I'm not scared of cancer any more. Trust me, I'm not bragging, I'm not telling a lie. I'm not scared of cancer any more. So many times, the cancer has come, and the cancer has gone away. Nowadays I counsel people who have cancer. I try to help them, because I know that 50 percent of recovery is in the mind.

Define your music for us.

Well, I grew up listening to Iron Maiden, Black Sabbath, and Deep Purple, but I'm also a very big fan of George Michael and Yanni and Abba, so when I write songs, all of those influences are fused in my music. I have more than 200 songs published in Bangladesh, from easy listening and soft pop to thrash metal and metalcore—from old-school heavy metal to Killswitch Engage to Iron Maiden to something like John Denver. You'll find everything there.

What was the role of bass in Bangladeshi music when you started playing?

Back then, bass guitar was regarded as a backup instrument in my country. People recognized the drummer, people recognized the guitarist or the vocalist or the keyboard player—but they never gave any recognition to the bass players back then. The keyboard and the vocals were the main things in music at the time. If someone played bass, their friends would be like, 'What are you playing? We don't understand these sounds'. If I recorded something, and showed it to my

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STILL YOUNG

Dave Young is one of Canada's most celebrated jazz bassists, having played over the last 50 years with Oscar Peterson, Tommy Flanagan, Kenny Barron and others. Now 82, he's as creative as ever. What's his secret?

Interview: Joel McIver **Photography:** Dan Nawrocki

Mantra is the sixteenth album from the Toronto-based songwriter, bassist, and Juno Award-winning member of the Order of Canada, Dave Young. Recorded with a sextet of trumpeter Kevin Turcotte, reedist Perry White and a backline of Reg Schwager on guitar, Brian Dickinson on piano, and Terry Clarke on drums, *Mantra* also includes as guests Ewen Farncombe on organ, John Johnson on alto sax and flute, and Les Allt on flute. Even if you don't play upright bass, you will be fascinated by the tone and bounce of Young's bass parts, which are unselfish but which also extend to some fiery soloing.

How did you choose the songs for *Mantra*, Dave?

The majority of them are original tunes, but whenever I record anything in a CD format, I always like to mix in a few jazz standards, because then people will think, 'Oh, yeah, I know this tune!' which makes it more approachable.

The bass on the album is mixed high, but it leaves space for everybody else, like a true bandleader.

Well, I always like to give the guys plenty of room. I mean, that's why they're there. I don't want to be in the spotlight all the time.

That said, I did notice that 30 seconds into track one there is a bass solo.

Yeah, well, who else is gonna ask you to do that? Ha ha!

Tell us about the instruments that you use.

The bass is a Poellmann, German made. It's worked very well for me over the 20 years that I've owned it. I think it was made in the late Seventies. I've had older instruments, but that was during a period when I played in a lot of orchestras of varying capacities. Now I basically have modern instruments.

Is there a significant difference from the player's point of view between old and new basses?

The price! These things are so darn expensive now. The older instruments that I've owned in the past are great, there's no question about it. They don't necessarily play easily, but they all sound great. Personally, I like the fact that a modern system doesn't require a huge amount of maintenance. As a bass player, I'm sure you're aware of the endless

repairs and cracks that always need fixing, so I usually prefer to play modern instruments for that reason.

How did you get started as a bass player?

I started out playing the violin when I was a youngster, maybe 10 or 12 years old. Then I graduated to the guitar, which I played for a long time in various groups. I do a lot of writing and arranging, so I can find my way around the piano too. The way that I took up the bass was unusual, I guess. I was playing the guitar in a dance band, which was a very good gig at the time. It was a weekend gig at the university where I was going to school. This would be in 1958 or 1959—somewhere in that time period. One night, the bandleader said, 'Dave, if you want to keep this particular engagement, come next week with a bass. We're gonna drop the guitar, and the bass player over there is leaving, because he's drinking too much'. So I went out on Monday morning, bought an upright bass and showed up on Friday night with it and played, having studied it in the interim. I went straight into it. I bought the bass on Monday and then played it until Friday. I don't really know how I did it, but I was intent on keeping the gig, so I just did it.



As this was 1958 or '59, was the band you were in playing any rock'n'roll?

No, it was a dance band—you know, three or four horns and the guitar plus a rhythm section. I was very much into rock'n'roll, though. I had my own group at one point, and we used to sing Elvis Presley material. It was fairly brief, probably about six or eight months, but it was very successful. But all along, jazz was attractive to me because it was more than three chords. That's really why I gravitated towards improvising.

Do you play the electric bass as well?

Yeah, I played it a lot. When I moved to Toronto, I played the electric bass for years, doing session work.

I still play it, actually:

I have a group that does all Donny Hathaway material. I prefer the string bass—obviously, because I spent almost a lifetime trying to figure it out—but the electric bass, I still practice, and I still really enjoy playing.

We meet a few upright bassists of your vintage who slightly despise the bass guitar for being the inferior instrument. Do you share that view?

Oh, no—I really enjoy the electric bass, and the guys that I work with, in this particular group, they love the fact that I play electric bass. I don't play too busy. I play in time, with quarter notes. I don't run all over the place, so they're really quite happy about my playing.

On the other hand, a lot of electric bassists find the upright incredibly hard to play. Do you have any advice for BP readers who are in that position?

Yes—I would say set aside a couple of years to familiarize yourself with the string bass. It's basically a physical instrument as opposed to the electric bass, which is a guitar, and not nearly as demanding. It doesn't create a lot of problems like tendonitis and back problems and all that stuff. I've had a lot of guys come to me and say, 'I'm an electric bass player, but I'm taking up the string bass. How long do you think that'll take?' I tell them it depends on how much time and devotion they're going to put into it. If they say, 'I plan to practice an hour a day', I tend to say 'I think we should end this conversation now. It's gonna take a lot more than one hour a day.' It's very time-consuming.

But you just told me that you went and bought a string bass and you were ready for a gig the following weekend.

I did, I did, ha ha! But I was completely

uninformed, and probably stupid. The bandleader was my friend, so he put up with me.

You once said that when you were at Berklee, you were expected to play bass six hours a day.

That was probably when I studied with Tom Monahan, who was a principal bass player. He demanded that we practice six hours a day, no less. I tried to fulfil his goal, not all the time, but you know, like any instrument, you have to put in the time, otherwise you're just spinning the wheels, doing one hour, maybe two hours. If you don't see some noticeable progress every week, then something is not right.

“Like any instrument, you have to put the time in, otherwise you're just spinning the wheels”

I wonder if today's kids have more resources when it comes to bass than we did.

I'm sure they do. They have endless transcriptions of music that they don't have to do. They can listen to anybody who's been a major player on any instrument. They've got all kinds of stuff that we never had, but I think that may be a disadvantage. When you were forced to transcribe stuff from records, that taught you something. It developed your ear and developed your sense of songwriting and what's going on. For me, it opened up a lot of things that I really was not aware of.



Reaping the rewards of playing bass six hours a day as a student.



Holding down a bass
duet: “Repeated errors
are not acceptable.”

Which bass players influenced you?

The standard list: Charles Mingus, Scott LaFaro, Jimmy Blanton. All the guys who were playing and recording at the time, like Paul Chambers and Israel Crosby. And from Canada, there’s a colleague of mine, Don Thompson, who is a wonderful bass player and also a fantastic piano player. There’s also Neil Swainson, who played for many years with George Shearing, and a fellow out of Montreal by the name of Michel Donato. He’s at my stage—we’re kind of winding down now. But Michel was a wonderful bassist who played quite a bit with Oscar Peterson.

As you did, of course. What kind of person was Oscar?

Oh, he was a very knowledgeable man, and he was a very demanding guy to work with. You had to give everything that you’d got. He said, ‘I don’t care what’s happened in your daily routine: When you get on the bandstand at night with me, I want 110 percent. That’s what I give, so I don’t expect anything less from my sidemen’. The first six months of my tenure with him were as a duo, so from January until July of 1975, we played all over

the world. There’s only two of you in that situation, so you can’t hide in the weeds.

What was it like to have no drummer? Were you constantly counting?

No, I didn’t count, I just learned the arrangements for the recordings. Most of the time I wrote them out, but when I went to his house to practice, I just threw it away, because he didn’t want to look at the music. He wasn’t a great reader, and if I said ‘This is what you did on the record’, he’d say, ‘I don’t care what I did on the record’.

If you made an error on stage, how did that go down with him?

Errors within reason were acceptable. Repeated errors were not acceptable—so you had to be careful. You didn’t want to make too many mistakes.

You said a minute ago that you were winding down. Does that mean fewer gigs?

It just means that once you hit a certain age, you’re doing less work, and you’re trying to enjoy the things in life that may not be related to music at all.

What are the things that you enjoy outside of music?

I have a farm, which is maybe an hour and a half outside Toronto. We go there on a regular basis and work on the gardens.

Where do you get inspiration from?

I get it from just getting up in the morning and looking out and seeing that it’s a nice clear day. I go out and cut wood. I have to be careful, though, because I use a chainsaw.

Yes, that could end your career pretty quickly. How are the fingers holding up?

Well, I don’t have any serious arthritis, but I do have touches of it. I’m in my eighties, and stuff starts to catch up with you, so I do my best to keep in shape. I work out in the mornings because, you know, I don’t want to just sit around and watch TV.

Thanks Dave. The album is great.

Thank you so much. It’s nice to have a few laughs! ■

*Mantra is out now at:
modicamusic.bandcamp.com*



SWEDE SENSATION

Leftfield rockers Placebo have returned with an album that was recorded in reverse, explains **Stefan Olsdal**

Interview: Joe Shooman

In 2022, says Placebo bassist Stefan Olsdal, making music includes using challenging and intriguing forms. The band's eighth album, *Never Let Me Go*, had its genesis in 2019—and Olsdal explains that bandmate Brian Molko came up with a fascinating concept for it.

"He came to me with the photograph that is now on the cover, and basically said, 'Let's take things, turn them on their head, and work backwards. Let's start with the photo.' It was a place to start again. Venturing into new horizons, starting a new chapter. It was the first time we'd begun an album without a permanent drummer. It harked back to the days of me and Brian in his council flat just messing with broken toy keyboards and badly-tuned guitars. The only difference is that we did this one in my studio where there were expensive vintage synths and guitars."

This pared-down writing process brought another freedom to the mix. "I'm not dissing any previous drummers!" he says. "But the more people that are in the room, the more opinions you have to take into account; their emotions, feelings, and ideas. Sometimes that can get in the way."

The result is an electronics-filled piece of work which, as well as providing the unique Placebo crunch, has a subtlety of timbre through its meticulous focus on arrangement. "There's a lot of sub-bass on the record," confirms Olsdal. "Sometimes that takes precedence over my live bass, on the song 'Surrounded By Spies', for example. It was absolutely about trying to find the space for different tonal qualities and characteristics, so we needed to find which instruments suited the vibe of what we were doing. Sometimes the four-string bass was there to add warmth, and the synth bass added either gnarliness or brought the electronic element into the picture—which has always been important."

Never Let Me Go continues the band's interest in loops and effects, and the album's opener, 'Forever Chemicals' is an example of that approach.

"The album begins with a weird loop that started off as a harp, on an iPad. Then we distorted it, put it through various effects and introduced an element of experimentation, taking something that wasn't necessarily supposed to be played in a certain way."

That urge to push at boundaries, says Olsdal, is both inherent and valuable. "You know, we have very, very low thresholds of boredom. Brian can't stay still on one thing for very long, and that's good. If something is too reminiscent of something we've done before, we pull each other up on it. The bottom line is that the music is the most important part."

Stefan Olsdal was born in Gothenburg, Sweden in 1974. It wasn't too long before music started to speak to him, he says, "I was about 12, and I found there was something there that helped me to express myself: Something I felt was mine in my early teenage years. I'd started to isolate in my head and didn't really know how to communicate, or connect, with the world. I was playing air drums to Queen in the back of the car one day, and I realized that I could actually learn music, so I got a drum kit and played along to whatever music was around.

The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Iron Maiden, they were all part of the mix."

He says that he soon decided to change instruments because he didn't want to be seated behind the drums and

placed at the back of the stage: As he puts it, "A bit of vanity came into the picture, so I bought a Fender Precision."

Stefan's older brother was a guitarist, and as anyone with siblings can confirm, there's always a blend of rivalry in play. Olsdal the younger decided to learn that instrument too, motivated by the opportunity to outstrip his bro's chops. His first songwriting efforts followed soon afterwards.

"There was also a piano in the house, and that was equally appealing. I sat there and figured out why I liked certain notes with other notes, and basically taught myself music theory. I translated that to guitar and bass, and they all became part of the

"Sometimes having to take other people's feelings into account can get in the way..."

★ Players

STEFAN OLSDAL, PLACEBO

same picture. I would record covers of Depeche Mode by myself, playing all the instruments, and singing badly. I don't really consider myself a bass player, or a guitar player. It was an amalgamation of wanting music in my life rather than, 'I want to put some bottom end to this.'"

Enter Molko, who certainly was a guitarist. "The first time I saw him play he had a percussionist but no bassist, so I said, 'Hey...'"

History often pivots on such moments of serendipity, and in 1996 Placebo released their self-titled debut album. Molko's experimental post-punk leanings and Olsdal's multi-instrumental nature proved an excellent fit.

"We were very young, so all the songs on that first album are at a breakneck speed. It was quite ferocious. We were testosterone-fuelled 20-year-olds. Placebo was a three-piece in the beginning, so our sense of melody and style were influenced by the limitations and freedoms of that. As we started to use the studio more as a tool, I started to use effects pedals live to fill in the gaps. Over the years we've gradually increased to six people on stage: The gradual evolution of the sound, embracing other instruments."

Stefan's basses in the early days were a Fender Jazz, which he used for the band's first three LPs.

Following that, he switched to a Gibson Thunderbird. For the new record, however, he's turned back to a tried and trusted instrument.

"I'd not used the P-Bass for 20 years—it's been in a lockup—but I was just drawn to it. The T-Bird can be very hard-sounding, which is great and responds well to distortion, but when it came to this album the Precision was more rounded, less aggressive. It brought out more of the melodic element. It was like, 'Oh, hello, old friend. Let's hang out again'. It's like you've not seen each

© Brit/Jullstein bild via Getty

"I will always be that 12-year-old who's just excited about playing"

other for 20 years but still, it seems like no time has passed."

A few years have now passed, though, since the band's exhausting, lengthy tours. Olsdal still bears scars

from those extended travels. "That last tour we did went on forever, and I had a rough time. I was so depleted and couldn't really find any meaning within Placebo. I'd lost any kind of reason to continue the band. It was the worst, personally, that it'd ever been, but the process of making this record has allowed me to really exorcise the bad vibes I brought with me from that, and to work things through. Making the album over three years really helped me to get my head together and use the creative process to remind myself why I want to be in this band."

Famously, David Bowie became a Placebo fan after hearing the huge hit 'Pure Morning'. At the time, the group were absolutely flying and were able, to an extent, to take it in their stride. "To protect ourselves from being in awe and paralyzed, we let ourselves ride on our confidence. Things were going our way. The moments we shared with Bowie, the little titbits of advice—they've all stuck with us. There was a magnitude to his presence, and having him want to work with us was an affirmation that gave us confidence to keep going."

These days, of course, it is Placebo who are the elder statesmen inspiring new generations—not that the bassist is comfortable with sitting on that particular throne. "I don't even think about it. I will always be that 12-year-old who's just getting excited about playing."



"I really don't consider myself a bass player."

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"The T-Bird can be very hard-sounding."



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BACK IN BLACK

Melanie Makaiwi of Black Sabbitch has some useful advice for back-pain sufferers. Seriously.

Photography Papa Joe El Paso

I started my musical journey on guitar: I've been in more bands as a guitar player than a bass player, actually, but I went on one tour where I made a bunch more money than I ever had, and I got all excited and came home and started working on my 'studio'. It was really just a converted garage that I would record song ideas on with a simple setup, but with this cash burning a hole in my pocket, I did a few upgrades—and one was buying a bass. It was a Fender Jazz, and I still have it. I just wanted to have a bass around in case I wanted to lay down some bass under my guitar ideas, but once I picked it up, something clicked. Like *hard* clicked. It felt so right, as if I'd been playing the wrong instrument all along.

Shortly after discovering this, my then-husband was starting a new band and asked me to fill in on bass until he found the right person. Turns out I was the right person, and that band—The Art Of Safecracking—locked in my love for the bass forever. I never touched another guitar since, except for when I drink too much wine and I serenade my cat with songs off of *Hunky Dory*... but no-one wants to hear that.

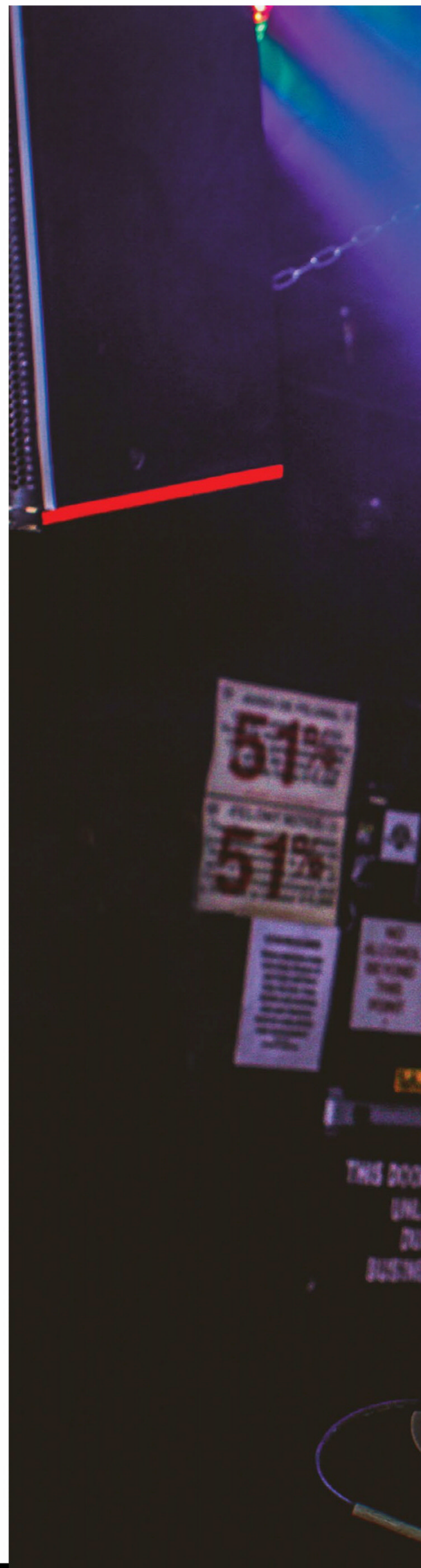
I currently have two Fender Jazz basses, one for standard tuning and one tuned to C#. I have an Ampeg SVT2, but also use an Ampeg B2RE when easier transport is needed. I keep the pedal situation simple these days: I've been using a Cry Baby Bass Wah and a Bass Big Muff, but I recently got turned on to the SansAmp Bass Driver and am really loving it. I also have a super-fun ukulele bass that I can't keep in tune for very long, but I love to play it, and I love its weird sound.

I'm currently playing bass in Black Sabbitch. When I joined this band, my reasoning was more about wanting to play with Angie, our drummer, than about wanting to play in a tribute band or to play Black Sabbath songs, honestly. She and I were an amazing rhythm section in a prior band and I missed our musical dynamic, so I agreed to give it a shot even though my Sabbath knowledge was not extensive. I grew up more in the punk, death rock and new wave scene, but it wasn't long before I fell totally in love with Sabbath, one song at a time.

As a lot of these tunes were new to me, I had to really study them, and sometimes go find isolated bass tracks so I could be sure I was hearing it right—thanks, internet—and then I really started to get to know Geezer Butler and all his amazingness. I've never done such a deep dive into another bass player's mind and fingers before, so I feel weirdly connected to him and am just always a bit tickled to be playing so much great shit that he has written. He's really a monster player and a great songwriter. He's heavy and groovy and melodic, and his bass-lines are so much fun to play. They can be quite challenging, which keeps me on my toes! I am definitely a better player because of him.

Want some good advice? Back your car up against the kerb before you try to load an Ampeg 8x10 cabinet into your trunk by yourself. The leverage from that foot of curb height is total perfection! Please pass it along... and save some lower backs. ■

Info: www.blacksabbitch.com





“Geezer Butler is really
a monster player
and a great songwriter.
I’m definitely a better
player because of him”



© Anna Varskevich

FINE TUNED

New York-based bassist **Michael Feinberg** is on a mission to evolve jazz. We find out how he plans to do it...

Bassist and composer Michael Feinberg recently released his eighth album as a bandleader, *Hard Times*—aptly titled given current events. He's joined by Leo Genovese on keyboards and synths, Billy Buss on trumpet, Godwin Louis on alto, Noah Preminger on tenor, Gabriel Globus-Hoenig on percussion, and Orrin Evans on piano—and there's also a very special guest,

Randy Brecker, who would likely not have been available for the session in non-pandemic circumstances, explains Feinberg. Moreover, this is no ordinary jazz album, he adds: It's a record with a mission.

Where are you from, Michael?

I'm from Atlanta. I went to University of Miami for school, and as soon as I graduated, I got the van and drove up to New York.

Miami must have been a fun place to go to college.

Well, I actually appreciate it a lot more since I left—because when I was there, I was just sitting in a practice room all day! Sometimes I went to the beach, but I wasn't living the real Miami lifestyle.

Did you move to New York to further your music career?

Yes, but I was already working in New York. I had a lot of friends that were there already, so I had already been playing in the clubs making connections. If you want to be a working musician, you have a couple of options. You're going to New York, or you're going to Nashville, or you're going to LA. I'm a New York guy: That was just my vibe.

It's clearly working out for you, because you're eight albums in and the new one sounds great.

Appreciated, thank you. The lockdown here was pretty stringent, but we had some loosening of the lockdown in September and October of 2020. Touring was still halted and there was no gigging, which was actually helpful because all these musicians were just sitting at home and they were available. That's

how I managed to acquire Jeff Watts on drums. I can't imagine that opportunity, because he's one of the busiest independent guys on the planet.

You've got Randy Brecker on there too.

Same with Randy—I would never have had the opportunity to make that happen, but for the pandemic. That was one of the early lessons I learned in music. There's a great drummer named Jim Black, who works in the DIY underground scene, and he gave me two pieces of advice. The first one was 'Always ask'. Whatever it is, just ask, because the worst thing that happens is that the person you're asking says no, and that's not the worst thing that can happen. The second thing was, as much as you can, make a record, go on tour, make a record, and go on tour. Just keep doing that, and pursuing that, and it'll all somehow fall into place. I didn't know Randy Brecker from anything: I just sent him an email, like a cold call. I said, 'Hey, man, I've loved your music for many, many years, and I have some music that I think you'd sound great on'. He said, 'I don't think I can do the whole record because of the pandemic, but I'll definitely do something', and we got him on a track. There you go. Always ask!

How much of the music was improvised?

With a lot of my music, I love to leave it up to

the players to figure out what it's going to sound like. You know, it's been about 100 years that we've had traditional jazz music, give or take, in the way that we think about it. How many times do I need to hear a melody with chord changes? Someone takes a solo, someone else takes another solo, and then the melody and the chord changes. When I think about putting this music together, I'm looking for a new way to present a jazz quintet. I ask myself how I can use this formula and this format, but do something with it that no-one has done, or come up with an evolution of the music while being true to what the core of jazz music is. Also, it's 2022, so there's all kinds of other music that I listen to and love and want to bring into my sphere as well—elements of funk, and what you could call world grooves, too.

Do you play both electric and upright bass?

Yes. I only play electric on one track this time, but I do play a lot of electric bass as well. I mostly play a Marcus Miller five-string Jazz. I actually started on electric bass when I was about 13 years old, but when I went to high school, I wasn't able to make the jazz band when I was in my first couple years there, so I played in the orchestra. That introduced me to this new instrument, the double bass, which was how I started in that world.

What is the upright bass that you play on the record?

That's a German bass. It's a monster and it's about 100 years old. It's huge, but I love it. I actually don't know who made it, but I think it used to belong to a great bass player named Alan Hampton. He used to live in New York, but he moved to LA and sold the bass. I use David Gage pickups that slide underneath the bridge. They have a great sound.

Does it need much maintenance?

No, but I have a funny story about the bass I played before this one. It got knocked over and completely shattered. I was coming home from a gig and I didn't know what to do. I called David Gage's wife in tears at three in the morning because I couldn't believe that this had happened. I ended up taking a garbage bag full of parts of my broken bass over to David's shop, and my insurance company gave me a check for the value of the bass, which I used to buy this new one. But somehow—miraculously—David put the old bass back together, so I ended up with two.

What's next for you?

I recently got a commission to write some new music through a grant from New York City, and I'm doing a residency in upstate New York, so I have a lot of music that I'm working on. I'll be recording soon for two very different projects, and going on tour for this album.

Which bassists influenced you?

I've always loved bass players who are also bandleaders, as well as bass players who have influenced me with their playing. There's Marcus Miller, although you don't really hear that in my music. I grew up as a huge Victor Wooten fan. I also love Dave Holland, John Patitucci, Stanley Clarke, obviously, and Christian McBride. And then, going back to the older-school guys, I'm big time into Jimmy Garrison, and you can't play the upright bass if you don't love Paul Chambers, Ron Carter and Oscar Pettiford. For me, it starts with Jimmy Blanton, Israel Crosby and Ray Brown, and it goes chronologically from there.

You could spend your life listening to those guys play, and you would never run out of things to learn.

Definitely. That's what I always think about Ron Carter. You know, he practices every day, and he says that he's still searching for the right notes. That's his process and his journey—and if Ron Carter, at 85 years old, is still practicing every day and still has things to learn, it tells you that there's never a time when you've finished learning bass. ■

Hard Times is out now. Info: www.mfbass.com



Incoming

Which bassist is equally inspired by Mingus and Maiden? Which one reveres The Meters and The Damned? And which bassist lost a bet and was reborn as a wolf? Meet **Paul Shine** of Dead Writers, **Grant Curry** of Flood Twin, **Kamikaze Boy** of Man With A Mission, and **Andy Champion** of Living In Shadows. We think one of those might be a stage name.

How did you get started on bass?

PAUL It was half necessity, half fascination. For me, playing bass came as a self-taught extension of my guitar playing, but I always really enjoyed it. Last year, Dead Writers were about to record our debut EP, and we didn't have a bassist. I had written the bass-lines for the songs anyway, so I stepped up to the job. I knuckled down and got a lot more confident with it, and eventually tracked it in the studio. The bass is so much fun. I love the simplicity and the feel of it. It connects with my primal side.

GRANT I started playing cello very young. I quite liked it, but had a very impatient teacher in the public school system. I gave it up after a year or so, opting for the rock'n'roll of guitar instead. I could play all right in my teens, but never felt connected to it. Some older friends with a band asked me to sit in one day on a loaned bass, and that was when I first felt musically grounded.

KB When I started a band with friends, I really wanted to play the guitar—but I lost at 'rock, paper, scissors', and started playing the bass.

ANDY I first picked up a bass guitar at the age of 11. I had just started listening to metal bands such as Iron Maiden, Metallica, and Slayer and wanted to play guitar. A school friend of mine owned a Kay copy of an EB-3, and as soon as I picked it up I had an immediate passion for it.

What was your first bass guitar?

PAUL A very cheap bass from a completely anonymous brand that a friend gave or sold me, I can't remember. It's pretty terrible to play with, but I still have it.

GRANT My first several basses were borrowed copies of different models. I eventually

bought a very nice Japanese-made Fender Jazz that suited me very well. I later had a 1971 sunburst Jazz that I loved and made several records with, until it was stolen after a Dallas gig. It was quite a heartbreak. I do currently have a custom-made Jazz of Warmoth parts that I quite like. It has 1970s Lollar pickups on a heavy swamp ash

body with a nicely profiled maple neck and ebony fretboard. It's got a tight bottom and a very aggressive top to it.

KB A used Greco bass. It was a Jazz model.

ANDY My first bass was an Aria Pro II XRB in red and black crackle finish—this was the late Eighties after all! I still have the body of said bass, but I've no idea where the neck went.

What gear do you currently use?

PAUL I like a Fender Jazz because I prefer a slim neck with a low action, so it's closer to the softer grip of a guitar, which I manage better. As for amps, it's Ampeg SVT-VR any time. The Tech 21 SansAmp is a fantastic tone-shaper tool as well, and sometimes if I add a touch of chorus, the Boss CEB-3.

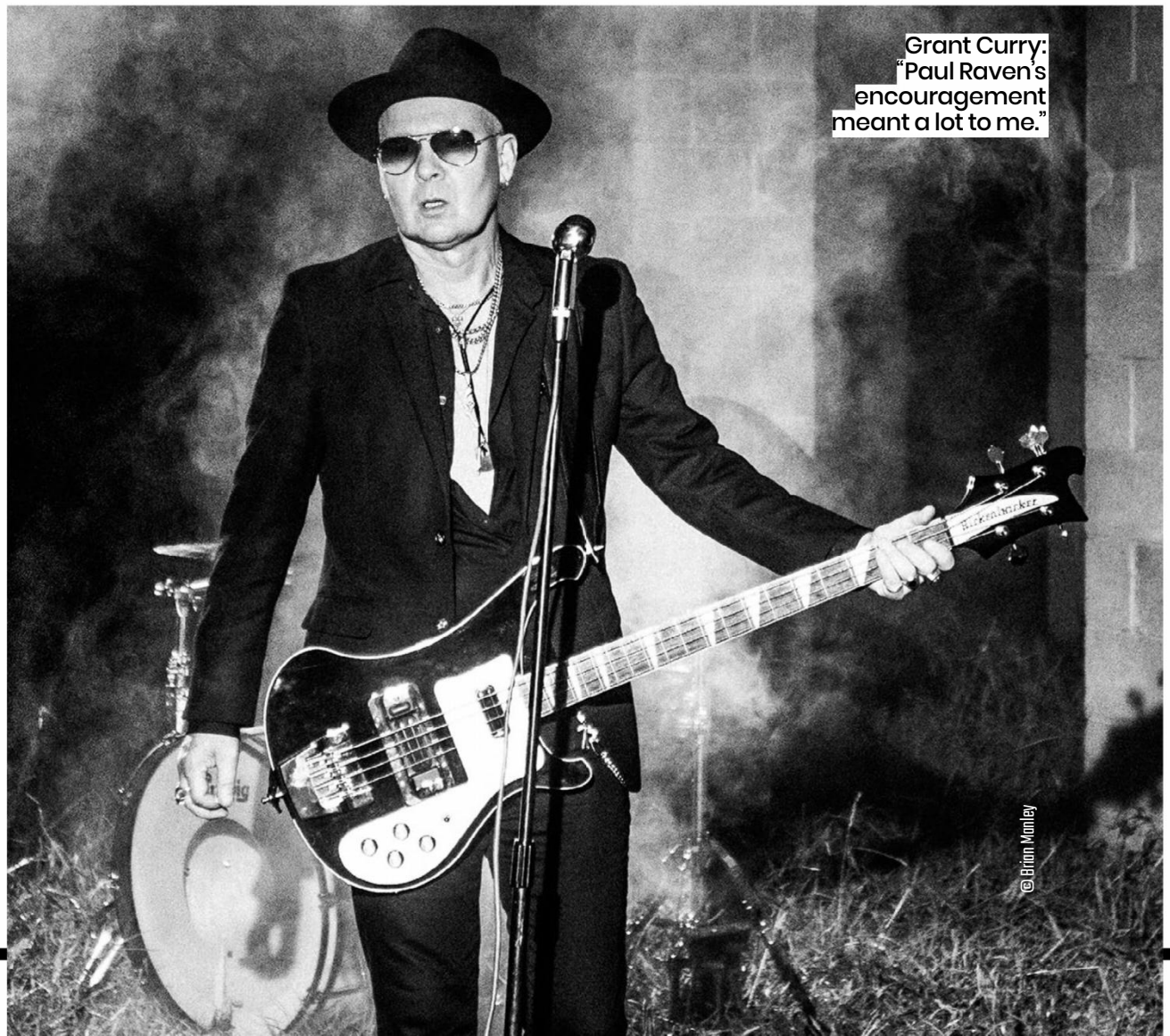
GRANT Depending on the project, in the studio I'll use a Rickenbacker, Precision or Jazz. For Flood Twin, it's all Rickenbacker 4003 with JBE humbuckers. I quite like the slightly abbreviated 33.25" scale length of a Rickenbacker. It's punchy and aggressive, or deep and dub. I string my Rics with DR Pure Blues. The only effect I use is a Wampler Faux Tape Delay for our song 'People'. There's some studio compression used in mixes as

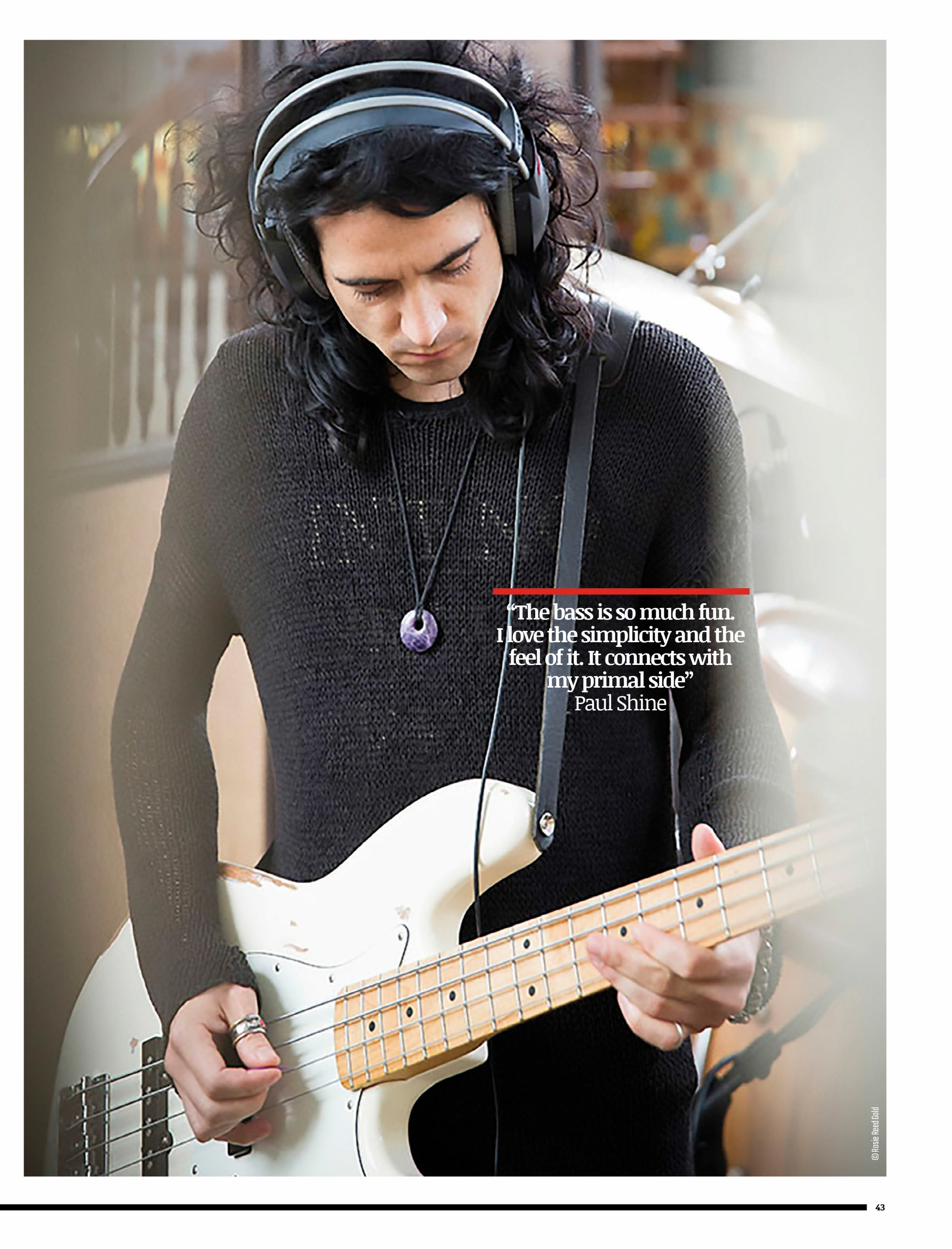
well. In a live setting, I use a Sansamp RBI preamp driving an 850-watt power amp for plenty of headroom. My main cabinet is a Barefaced Bass Retro 6x10, which

"I started playing cello very young. I liked it, but had a very impatient teacher in the public school system"

Grant Curry

Grant Curry:
"Paul Raven's
encouragement
meant a lot to me."



A full-page photograph of Paul Shine, a man with long dark curly hair, wearing large headphones and a black textured sweater. He is playing a white Fender Precision Bass guitar. The background is a softly blurred indoor space, possibly a studio or rehearsal space, with warm lighting. A quote is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**“The bass is so much fun.
I love the simplicity and the
feel of it. It connects with
my primal side”**
Paul Shine

Andy Champion:
“I was very inspired
by Steve Harris of
Iron Maiden.”



sounds great and is quite loud and easy to carry around.

KB I play a Warwick Streamer Stage 1 and an Ibanez BTB1835 five-string, with various effects and Ampeg heads and cabs.

ANDY My main bass guitars are a Fender 62 reissue Jazz, a Rickenbacker 4003, a Warmoth parts J-style fretless five-string and a Squier Precision. For amplification I use an Ampeg SVT VR, through either an Ampeg 810 or 410HLF cab. My pedalboard consists of a Sansamp Bass Driver DI, Digitech Bass Whammy, Morley Cliff Burton Power Fuzz Wah, EHX Bass Microsynth, Boss DD-6, TC Electronic Hall Of Fame, and a Boss RC-50 loop station. I also play a 1949 Czech double bass which I amplify with an Acoustic Image Ten2 amp.

What’s the best advice you’ve ever been given about playing bass?

“Always be aware of how you sound. It’s easy to go on autopilot and get into the habit of playing one particular way”
Andy Champion

telling me once to never worry about playing too little. David Haskins, of Bauhaus and Love And Rockets, once suggested I find comfort in finding my own musical personality rather than trying to appropriate someone else’s style. Paul Raven of Killing Joke, Prong, and Ministry seemed to really like my dominant right-hand style. His encouragement meant a lot to me, and I’ve missed him since he passed a few years ago.

KB “Feel the rhythm with your heel, not your toes” was very helpful advice. I feel like it allows me to experience the groove with my body.

ANDY Always be aware of how you sound. It’s easy to go on autopilot and get into the habit

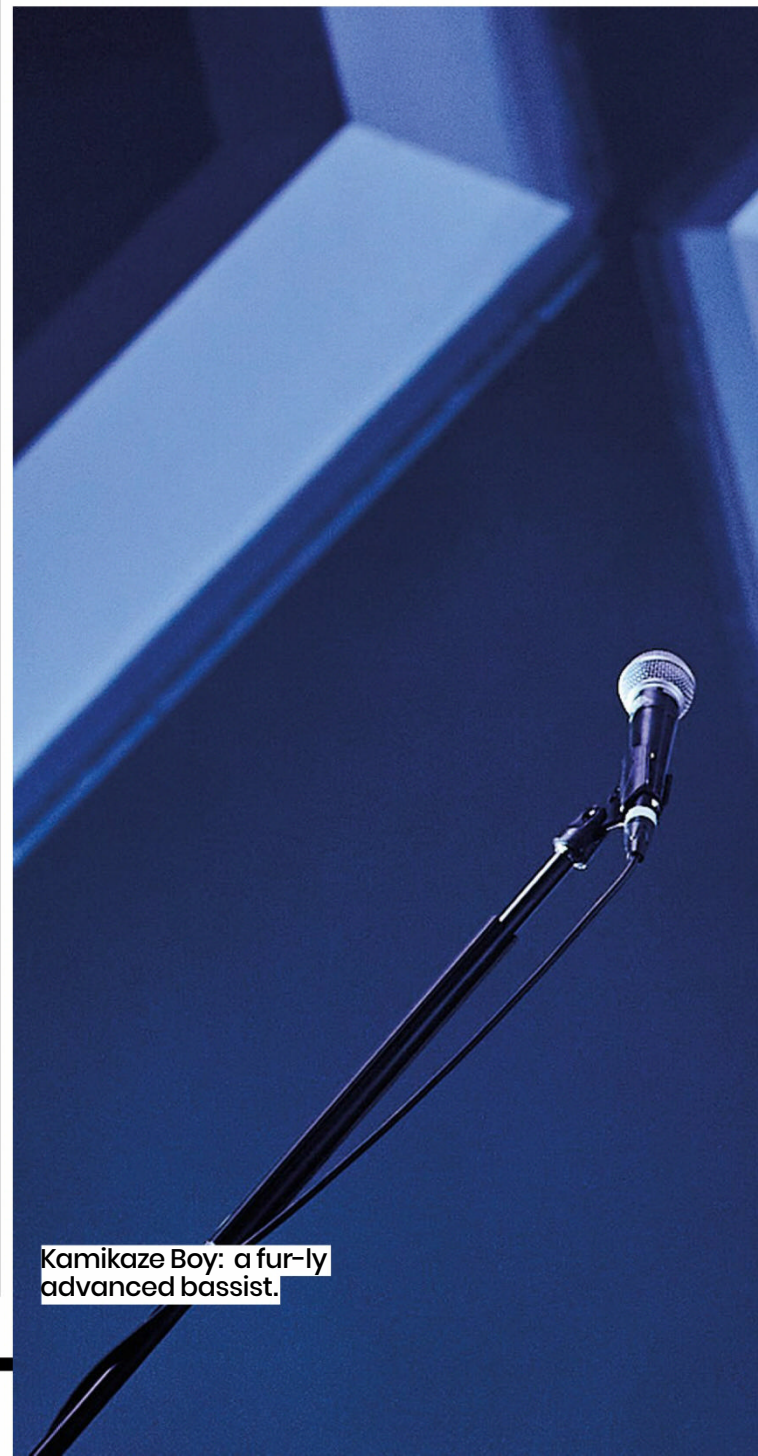
of playing one particular way. Practice fingerstyle, thumb—not just slap—plectrum and so on. Don’t just have a good technique, have many good techniques. And whatever you’re playing, ask yourself—is this the best sound I can produce for this song?

Which bass player do you most admire?

PAUL Simon Gallup from The Cure is one of my favorites, with his gritty tone, pick bite and visceral attitude. Also, Paul McCartney for his originality of arrangements and brilliant sense of melody. And John Paul Jones from Led Zeppelin is an absolute virtuoso to me.

GRANT Jah Wobble on PIL’s *Metal Box* had a tremendous impact on me. There’s no fuss in his playing: It’s simple, deep and infectious. Tracy Pew of The Birthday Party also impacted me deeply. It seemed he didn’t give a fuck about what anyone else was doing. He was convicted, literally and figuratively.

KB Hidekazu ‘Hinachi’ Hinata. He is a bassist that plays for various Japanese rock bands such as Art-School and Zazen Boys. His live shows are just really cool. I keep chasing his bass sound with my ears.



Kamikaze Boy: a fur-ly advanced bassist.

ANDY When I was starting out I was very much inspired by Steve Harris of Iron Maiden, who is a very melodic player but he still locks in with the drums in the traditional sense of a rhythm section. He always seems to play in the middle or upper registers of the bass, which is quite unusual for a heavy metal player. When I took up double bass in my mid-twenties, Charles Mingus became my hero: An incredibly virtuosic player with immense chops, both pizzicato and arco, but when it came time to lay it down and swing, nobody drove a rhythm section like him. I also have to mention Paul McCartney, a beautifully melodic player with a great sense of time and phrasing—and he sings at the same time.

Where can we hear you play?

PAUL Dead Writers' self-titled debut EP came out in December. I play on the whole record except for the track 'She's All The Animals', on which we had the very excellent Ben Ellis, from Iggy Pop's touring band. I'm really pleased with the bass sound on these songs, which I also owe to Mark Tucker, who mixed them with us beautifully.

GRANT Our self-titled album is now streaming via SoundCloud and Bandcamp. We'll see how things play out with the pandemic and hope to be doing tours this year.

KB Our studio album *Break And Cross the Walls I* is out now. [We ask KB about the album concept, and he replies as follows—Ed] In the age where the earth was surrounded by flames of war, the mad genius scientist Dr. Jimi Hendrix (hobby: Guitar) created the ultimate life form—Man With A Mission. Are they human? Are they wolves? In the shadows of the dark history all over the world, they were answering to the commands of the evil ruler. Feeling the guilt of what his research has given birth to, Dr. Jimi froze them in Antarctica for an eternal sleep so that

they can never wake up and be in the hands of anyone else. Time passes, and it is 2010. The world was going through an economic crisis, continuous political instability and global warming was endangering the planet. Jimi risked his life to make the wolves sleep but this natural crisis caused the ice coffin in Antarctica to melt. MWAM woke up from their eternal sleep. Are they bringing justice to the world? Or evil?

“The world was going through an economic crisis, continuous political instability and global warming was endangering the planet. Jimi risked his life to make the wolves sleep but this natural crisis caused the ice coffin in Antarctica to melt...”
Kamikaze Boy

ANDY Living In Shadows is recording our second album, which will be released this year. I also have a brand new album out with the avant-rock trio Shiver, led by the amazing guitarist Chris Sharkey. ■

PAUL:
@deadwritersband
GRANT: floodtwin.com
KB: mwamjapan.info
ANDY:
@andychampionbass



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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.

Let us know what you think of our conclusions. Did we get it right?

Joel McIver, Editor

Reviewed this month...

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FENDER

PLAYER PLUS

ACTIVE METEORA

\$1199, www.fender.com

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BASS JAPAN DIRECT

CS-5/345

\$2600, www.bassjapandirect.com

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PHIL JONES BASS

X4 NANOBASS COMBO

\$359.99, www.pjbworld.com

56

FLATTLEY

BASS CHIEF AND BASS POISON IVY

\$349 each, flattleyguitarpedals.com/retailers





FENDER
www.fender.com

FENDER

Player Plus Active Meteora

The Editor tackles the new Player Plus Active M-Bass



\$1199

Fender's design division have obviously been having a lot of fun lately, expanding their Parallel Universe line of instruments in 2018 with the new Meteora range and adding a Custom Shop version two years later. While that high-spec bass came with an equally high price tag, this new active Meteora has been slotted into Fender's Player Plus line of relatively affordable, high-functionality instruments, with a user cost in the low four figures.

I reviewed the Player Plus Precision a couple of issues back and was impressed, because it offered loads of tone options and playability at a reasonable price, while still being recognisably Fender-esque: Let's see if the much more radically-shaped Meteora can match up.

Build Quality

Before we get into the literal nuts and bolts of this instrument, let me start by saying how inspiring it is to play a bass that has no neck-dive whatsoever, presumably due to its body shape. The extra mass at the back and bottom of the Meteora means that you don't have to hold the neck up with your fretting hand. This might sound trivial, but believe me, after eight million bass reviews, you appreciate this detail.

Take a look at that body shape, then. There's bits of Jaguar and Mustang in there, and even a hint towards the wacky Teisco instruments from the Sixties that you still see in guitar stores. I suppose it's weird enough to put a few people off, but once you're actually playing the thing, it all starts to make sense, as we'll see in a minute.

Components-wise, there's nothing particularly out of the ordinary: Fender have stuck closely to the familiar P and J templates in more or less every way other than the body design. The body wood is alder and the neck is the expected maple; there's a choice of pau ferro or maple fingerboard, depending on which finish you go for.

The neck feels like a blend of Precision and Jazz, without the club-like dimensions of the former and some of the slinkiness of the latter. Its finish is grippy enough for your fretting-hand thumb to feel at home, but there's enough glide to make speedy upper-register fills doable: The rolled edges assist your playing speed, too. Twenty medium jumbo frets remind you that yep, this is a Fender, and the hi-mass bridge and cloverleaf tuners are satisfyingly chunky, helping to give this bass a feeling of solidity.



FENDER
www.fender.com

Sounds And Playability

Where the Meteora differs noticeably from your usual P and J models is in its beefed-up electronics, in place presumably because today's young bassists need plenty of power and tones. Two Fireball humbuckers deliver the sounds, alongside an 18-volt active preamp—with batteries in two pop-out chambers—and a three-band EQ for cut and boost. You're also supplied with a mini-switch to toggle between active and passive modes, and don't forget your glasses, because 'mini' means exactly that in this case. A master volume and pickup selector finish off what is a very sophisticated control layout compared to the old single volume and tone of the P-Bass—a family Ford to the Meteora's Ferrari.

Fire everything up and you're rewarded with a lively set of tones, with tons of range and enough power to defeat more or less any stubborn band mix. The bass boost is especially monstrous, and while the top end is less violent, there's plenty of glassy edge for you. The mids, always a lifesaver, can be boosted to a decent level too. Here at *BP* we never neglect passive tones, having had a few batteries die on us over the years, so it's a pleasure to report that the Meteora's passive mode is just fine; not mind-blowing but definitely good enough.

The playability of this bass is its strong suit, but then again any well set-up Fender is a joy to play. Our review model's action is low and the strings brand new, so nippy playing is a piece of cake: There's something about the combination of chunky neck and low action that feels both effortless and solid.

You'd expect all this at this price, of course, but one thing that is completely new about the Meteora is access to the higher frets, thanks to the lack of a lower horn. Soloists and tappers will love this, and given that the Player Plus range is perfectly tailored to YouTubers and slap enthusiasts, who—let's face it—are often one and the same, this element of the instrument's playability is both well-conceived and well-executed.

Conclusion

This is a great bass. Whether or not you like the body shape, you'll enjoy the amped-up power and tone range, as well as the player-friendly feel. I have to give Fender credit: They've come up with a wholly appropriate concept with this 'Player Plus' idea—because this is essentially a Fender bass with a bit extra. Hats off to them. ■

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

RRP | \$1199
Made In | Mexico
Body | Alder
Neck | Maple, 34" scale
Neck join | Bolt-on
Fretboard | Pau ferro or maple, 20 frets
Pickups | 2 x Fender Fireball humbuckers
Controls | Volume; bass, mid and treble boost/cut; active/passive toggle switch, pickup selector
Electronics | 18-volt active preamp
Hardware | Nickel and chrome tuners, hi-mass bridge
Weight | 9 lbs

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | High-register fret access, no neck dive
Minus | Shape will deter purists
Overall | A refreshing take on the Fender feel, but with a new edge

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY



SOUND QUALITY



VALUE



DRAGONFLY

CS-5/345

A custom five-string from Japan is always worth investigating, says Mike Brooks

BASS JAPAN DIRECT
www.bassjapandirect.com

\$2600

The Dragonfly bass brand emanates from the Harry's Engineering company in Japan, which features bass builders who previously worked for Aria in the Eighties. This particular model may look a little understated, but its materials, construction, finishing, and electronics package suggest otherwise, especially when it comes to coaxing some suitably impressive tones from it. For the lowdown on this beauty from Tokyo—read on.

Build Quality

With a distinctive headstock design, a sweetly rounded body shape and an extensive lower cutaway that offers easy access to the upper frets, the Dragonfly's physical attributes are enticing. The body contouring is limited, to say the least, with only slight rear shaping and none at all to the upper body bout on the front facing. However, the bass feels solidly constructed and well-assembled and, weighing in at 8.6 pounds (3.9 kilograms), it's no back-breaker, which isn't always the case with five-strings. The bass has an organic feel, reinforced by the satin finish applied to the two-piece maple body timber and maple and walnut laminated neck.

The maple and walnut neck features a shallow D-shaped profile and as far as five-string necks go, is very comfortable to play—it fits like a glove. The 48mm nut width suggests a broad pau ferro fingerboard, but it works due to the slim profile and this, coupled with 19mm string spacing at the bridge, makes for a very comfortable playing experience. The level of finishing from top to bottom is very impressive and, with no sharp frets along either edge of the neck, player comfort is reinforced with a high level of playability.

The inclusion of the three-ply black scratchplate, abalone position markers with white dots on the side of the neck, and gold Gotoh hardware gives the whole instrument a somewhat traditional vibe, with a foot in the glamor stakes. The hardware does what it should, with the bridge offering through-body and top-loading stringing, and feels and operates solidly, giving the impression of reliability that you would expect from Gotoh. Don't be put off by the extensive control layout, as it's easier to navigate than you might expect, with volume, pickup balance and tone controls, alongside a three-band EQ and active/passive and mid-frequency switches.

Sounds And Playability

With its maple, walnut and pau ferro timbers, you would expect this bass to offer plenty of bounce and brightness in its natural tone characteristics. Those elements certainly come across, although the walnut and pau ferro contribute a smoother, less harsh element to the tone. Plugged into an amp with the EQ set flat both there and on the bass, the Dragonfly exhibits a lively resonance and strong sustain. The



DFSB single-coil pickups offer a warm bite when panned centrally, while the neck-biased unit sounds well-rounded but with the familiar single-coil spring in its step. The bridge unit sounds vibrant with the characteristic mid-bias you might expect, but it never sounds thin.

The three-band EQ is something of a mixed bag: The bass EQ is solid and powerful, while both mid-frequency options give the bass a broad palette of options and a significant growl. However, the treble EQ is very polite, rather too much so. If you require a cutting, glassy top end, you may be disappointed. The passive options are strong, though, and the passive tone control is beneficial in giving the player usable tones with varying degrees of light and shade. String and note volume across the whole neck is consistent, although the low B string's performance is a little woolly. Otherwise, the bass performs very well and should appeal to many players.

Surprisingly, for a bass under nine pounds, the Dragonfly exhibits some noticeable headstock bias: Even when placed on a strap, the bass wants to sit horizontally across the player's body. Nevertheless, the instrument's playability isn't in question.

Conclusion

So, here we have a bass with some great elements, and as a whole, it's enjoyable to play. With a few tweaks here and there, it could become more desirable. Dragonfly basses are custom-ordered instruments, so if your attention has been piqued, check online for further options for your own custom build. ■

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | \$2600 + import taxes

Made In | Japan

Color | Natural, satin finish

Body | Maple, two-piece

Neck | Walnut and maple, five-piece

laminated, 34.5" scale, satin finish

Neck Joint | Bolt-on, five-bolt attachment

Nut Width | 48mm

Fingerboard | Pau ferro

Frets | 24

Pickups | Dragonfly wood-covered

DFSB-4N and 4B single-coil pickups

Electronics | Dragonfly DFB3 preamp,
active, 9-volt

Controls | Volume, pickup balance, passive

tone control, three-band EQ (bass/middle/

treble), active/passive switch, mid-

frequency switch (300/480 Hz)

Hardware | Gold hardware, Gotoh 404SJ-5

bridge, Gotoh GB707 machine heads

Weight | 8.6 lbs

Case/gig bag included | Gigbag

Left-hand option available |

As a custom order

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Construction; tonal options

Minus | The treble EQ is a little muted
and the low B didn't shine

Overall | An interesting custom bass
with much going for it

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★☆☆

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★☆☆

VALUE

★★★★★☆☆

PHIL JONES BASS

X4 NanoBass Combo

How does a bass amp featuring nanotechnology size up? Kevin Johnson weighs in

PHIL JONES BASS
www.pjbworld.com

\$359.99

Amp designer and mad scientist Phil Jones has built a reputation for getting a big sound out of small speakers, but there's usually more than one of them in his products. His latest creation is the multi-instrumental X4 Nanobass, which his company calls the most compact and portable combo he's ever designed.

The unit features a single four-inch driver in an enclosure that measures 6.3" by 7.9" by 7.8" and weighs just 5.3 pounds. Billed as the perfect amp for your desktop or on the go, it has a headphone jack for silent practice and, crucially, two options for playback from external sources.

A 1/8" jack lets you manually plug in, while Bluetooth capabilities let you stream from the mobile device of your choice. An independent level knob allows for setting the output from either external source you choose. Last in its control set is a three-band EQ for tone shaping.

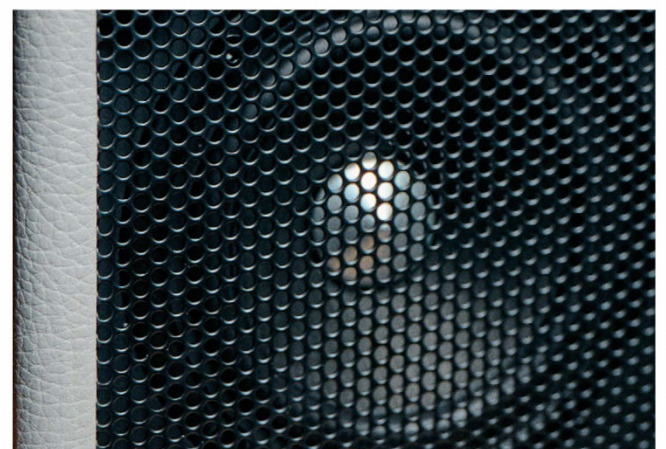
Even at its diminutive size, the X4 feels very sturdy. The AC input, which accepts worldwide voltage, is situated on the bottom right side of the amp, leaving the right-angled plug to stick out about one inch.

This must be a factor of fitting so much into a tiny space, but it does make it more awkward when sitting on a tight desk. All of the controls are very straightforward, and connecting to the Bluetooth is as simple as one push of the aux-in level knob.

As is evidenced in the owner's manual, Jones and his team of wizards have spent lots of time and resources to design the X4. I'm here to tell you that it worked. The sound is clean and clear, even articulating a low B-string very nicely. Its low end reflects your instrument's voice, but goosing the bass knob adds a surprising amount of heft and warmth.

At 35 watts, it won't compete with drums, but it certainly hangs with acoustic jams. Mostly I found myself using it as a quick tool to jam with music and drum apps. I may be greedy, but I would have liked to see it have a direct output, seeing as it sits right at your workstation.

Ultimately, the X4 is a convenient practice tool that sounds great, and having a great sound is a key to inspiration in your practice sessions. At \$360, there's a price for convenience, but it's an investment to have your tone in a combo you can bring anywhere. ■



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | \$359.99**Made in** | China**Power** | 35 watts**Speaker** | 1 x N52 Neo-Power 4" speaker driver**Features** | Digital power amp with DSP-based active crossover and dynamic range control, three-band EQ, 1/8" stereo Aux input, Bluetooth 5.0 (aptX HD), Aux/Bluetooth level control, headphone output, worldwide AC voltage input (100-240V)**Weight** | 5.3 lbs**WHAT WE THINK****Plus** | Fantastic tone and convenience in a tiny package**Minus** | Awkward plug angle, innovation comes at a price**Overall** | An amp the size of a shoebox shouldn't sound this good – but it does**BP RATING**

BUILD QUALITY



SOUND QUALITY



VALUE



Phil Jones and his team of wizards have spent time and resources to design the X4. I'm here to tell you that it worked



FLATTLEY

Bass Chief and Bass Poison Ivy

Add color to your tone and pedalboard, advises Joel McIver

FLATTLEY
flattleyguitarpedals.com/retailers

**\$349
each**

The UK-built Flattley effects range has been around for a few years now, and we've followed their progress with interest. These two bass overdrives, recently updated for a more convenient layout, look and feel fantastic—who doesn't like 'Dios Del Muerte' artwork and a halo light effect?

Plugged in, the Bass Chief matches expectations. While we're inundated here at *BP* with nuclear-strength overdrives that will break your neighbor's fish tank, this one has plenty of subtlety built in. Sure, the Volume control is very responsive and will have your arm off if you roll it on too fast. Still, the other rotary pots—Blend, Overdrive, Bass and Treble—allow you to introduce just a slight touch of crunch to your tone, even at low volume: Enough to add a bit of clank and grind, but without being completely obnoxious.

The other attractive points of this pedal are that it retains plenty of low end when distorted, always the goal of any bass overdrive, and that the overdriven tone is relatively smooth to the ear. There's tons of sustain, and indeed the tone can get quite doomy very

quickly, especially if you use the last 10 percent or so of the Blend control. If you do, the fully wet tone is monstrous.

The Bass Poison Ivy, which has the same RRP and dimensions as the Bass Chief, gives you an overdriven tone with more clarity than its sibling thanks to the presence of an Attack control. Roll this into its second hemisphere and max out the Fuzz control, and you can achieve a thoroughly screaming distortion that is a long way away from the creamy crunch of the Bass Chief. Add treble from the EQ or from your bass, and you'll successfully be able to annoy large numbers of people.

In practice, this effect sounds best if you enter Geezer Butler mode and play a bluesy solo, or head into desert-rock territory and zone out with some low-to-mid octave drones. You can add cut with the Attack pot or head back into a bass-heavy tone range if you wish: Both are easy to set up. You really need the Attack and Fuzz controls to be in their second half to make significant overdrive sounds, but that's fine: Armed with a naturally topky bass like a Rickenbacker, for example, you'll be in drive heaven. ■



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | \$349 each

Made in | UK

Features | True bypass; (Bass Chief) Blend, Volume, Overdrive, Bass, Treble pots (Poison Ivy) Volume, Attack, Blend, Fuzz pots

Power | 9-volt DC

Weight | 12.3 oz, 11.4 oz

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Great overdrive tones

Minus | Lots of competition exists at this price point

Overall | Highly user-friendly overdrives

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★★

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★★

VALUE

★★★★★★★★★★

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Bass Lessons

Making you a better bass player in every issue, our state-of-the-art team of educators will guide you every step of the way. Say hello to them here!



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

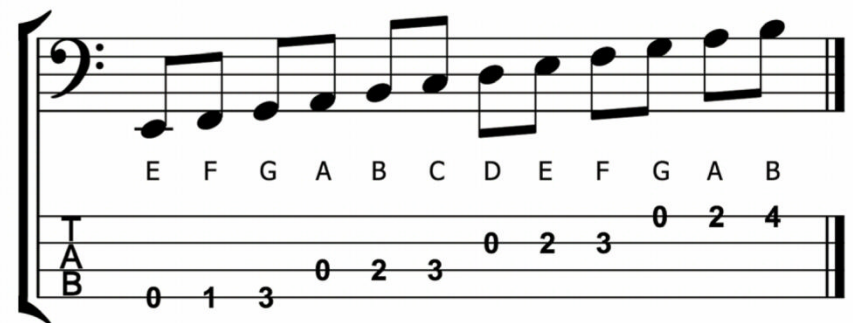
Maximise your bass skills with our advanced studies Toronto-born electric bassist Rich Brown has established himself as an incredibly versatile artist. Along with being one of the most called-upon electric bass players in Canada, Rich is a composer, producer, bandleader, educator and clinician, broadcaster, 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

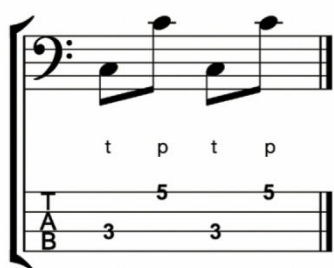
The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in Bass Player magazine

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.

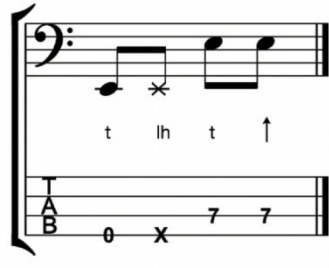


PLAYING TECHNIQUES



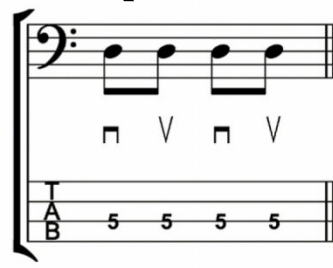
SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE

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

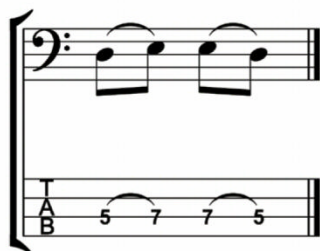
Where necessary, down and upstrokes with the pick will be shown using these symbols (down-up-down-up).



TAPPING TECHNIQUES

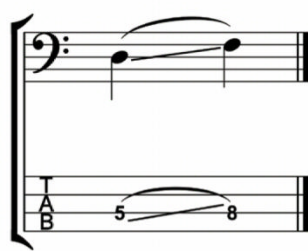
Fretting hand taps have a '+' in a circle. Picking hand taps are just '+'. Particular fingers may be shown with numbers.

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.



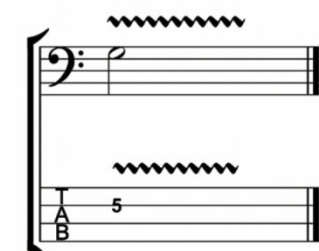
SLIDE (GLISSANDO)

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



TRILLS

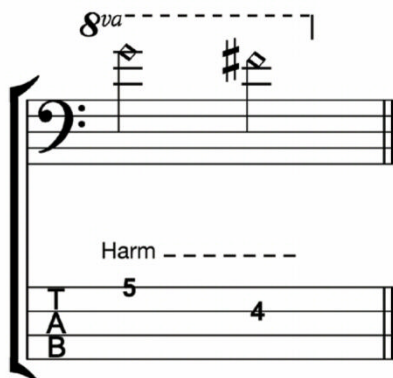
Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown, using hammer-ons and pull-offs.



VIBRATO

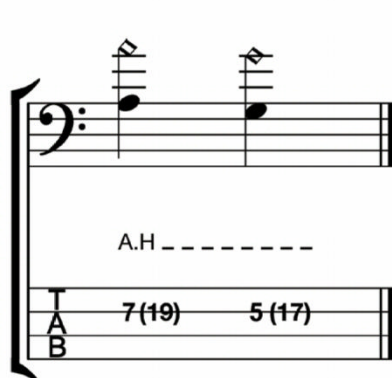
The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger.

PLAYING HARMONICS



NATURAL HARMONICS

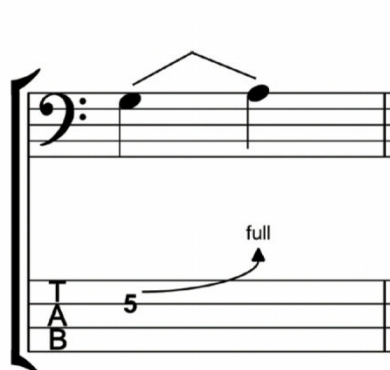
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated.



ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

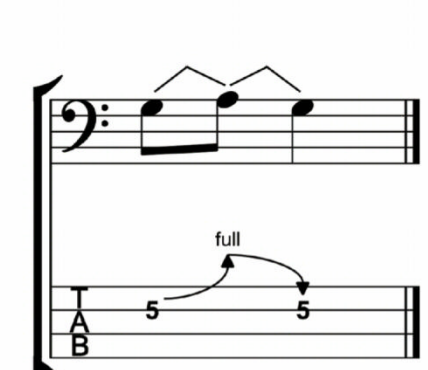
Pluck while fretting the lower note and touching the edge of the picking hand thumb to the note in brackets.

BENDING NOTES



BEND

The note is bent upwards to the interval specified: $\frac{1}{2}$ 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.



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

I SPY...

THE SOUL-FINGER SIXTH IN USE

Hey there, bass players! Welcome back to our discussion of patterns. So far, we've explored the basics of the blues box, as well as the blues rock walk—two distinctive patterns that fall nicely on the instrument and provide essential ingredients to plenty of our favorite bass-lines. We're keeping with the theme and this time, adding a little rhythm to our blues.

Whether you're learning Stax, Motown, Muscle Shoals, or even Wrecking Crew repertoire, there's a common thread that runs throughout the genre of classic soul and R&B. It involves using the root note of the chord, the fifth of the chord, and the major sixth. It lands nicely on the instrument and sounds

fantastic over any major chord. Behold, the soul-finger sixth.

If you've kept up with this column series, then you're already familiar with using a major arpeggio (the root, third, and fifth) and adding the sixth.

We did this to get the blues-rock walk pattern. This time, we're going to drop the major third and get a bit creative with the rhythm. Plenty of soul bass-lines integrate syncopation, or the use of eighth notes and sixteenth notes. This allows us to move away from the straightforward walking bass pattern or the consistency of pedalled notes. It's the

perfect foil for getting people on the dance floor, and the rhythms can often be adapted to straight or swung feels.

Before we go down the rhythmic rabbit hole, let's dig deeper into the harmony. As

Plenty of soul bass-lines use syncopation to move away from the walking bass pattern

I mentioned before, we're favoring the root, fifth and major sixth. The root and fifth are chord tones, so they're sure bets over both major and minor chords. The sixth, however, lives

in the world of the major scale and the major pentatonic scale. We can safely use this pattern over the I, IV, and V chords, assuming we're playing by the diatonic rules.

EXERCISE ONE

♩ = 100 ♩ = $\frac{3}{4}$ ♩

C **G**

F **C**

Coincidentally, it also works over the ii chord, even though that chord is often minor. Most soul and R&B tunes feature progressions that rely on these chords, so we can seamlessly apply this soul-finger sixth across the board.

Next, let's focus on rhythm. Since we want to get people movin' and groovin', we will steer clear of the quarter-note feel of a walking bass-line and begin to integrate syncopation. One common rhythm used in soul and R&B bass-lines is the dotted quarter note on beat one, followed by another eighth note on the 'and' of beat two. This adds a delightful bounce and sounds great over a straight, swing, or shuffle drum groove. Let's play an exercise and see how this works on the fretboard.

In **Exercise 1**, we're going to move through the chord progression C, G, F, C (or I-V-IV-I in the key of C) with a graceful swing feel. The bass-line begins with a dotted quarter note on the root (C on the third fret of the A string), followed by an eighth note on the fifth (G on the 5th fret of the D string), a quarter note on the sixth (A on the 2nd fret of the G string), and a quarter note on the fifth again. Play this pattern twice, then move the same pattern to the V chord, starting on G at the third fret of the E string. Move it once more to the IV chord, F on the first fret of the E string, then return to C for two bars to finish up a simple eight-bar progression.

Now that you've got this pattern under your fingers, let's add another layer of complexity. Instead of visualizing these intervals as ascending, meaning that we find the fifth and sixth scale degrees higher, we're going to descend to these pitches. Over the C chord, the fifth scale degree is G, which we can find on the 3rd fret of the E string. The sixth scale degree is an A, just a whole step above G. This can be played on either the 5th fret of the E string or as the open A string. See how we found the same notes, just an octave lower?

In **Exercise 2**, our bass-line will feature a slightly busier rhythmic pattern while integrating these lower intervals. This time, our chord progression will stay on C for four bars, then move to F for two bars and G for two bars. Begin on C at the third fret and play a pattern using the lower fifth and sixth (G and A on the E string). Play a dotted quarter note on the root and then use eighth notes to complete the rest of the bar. Move this pattern up to F on the 3rd fret of the D string, and then up to G on the 5th fret of the D string.

Exercise 3 features the same chord progression and a very similar bass-line. This time, we'll play the same pattern, but with the higher fifth, sixth, and octave. In order to play this groove across all strings, you'll have to

EXERCISE TWO

♩ = 100 ♩ = $\frac{3}{4}$ ♩

C

F **G**

EXERCISE THREE

♩ = 100 ♩ = $\frac{3}{4}$ ♩

C

F **G**

descend to the F and G chords. Feel free to integrate open strings, particularly on the F chord. For added fun, try playing all of these exercises with a straight-time feel instead of with the underlying swing.

While this might take a bit of getting used to, it's extremely important to begin visualizing intervals ascending and descending. Understanding how to adapt a pattern to fit the direction you're moving in on the fretboard will help you gain flexibility as a player. After all, our ability

to play certain patterns will change depending on the key of the song and where you choose to find root notes.

If you want to spy some of these patterns in action, take a listen to any playlist of soul hits. Some of my favorites include 'I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch)' by the Four Tops, 'Rescue Me' by Fontella Bass, 'That's It—I Quit—I'm Movin' On' by Sam Cooke, and 'Time Is Tight' by Booker T & the MGs. Enjoy working through these patterns, and I'll see you next month! ■



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

FIVE OF THE BEST

USE CHROMATIC SHAPES IN PENTATONICS

We've talked a fair bit about pentatonic shapes over the last few months here. Today, we're going to use them as a framework for adding chromatic notes into our bass-line construction. It's a technique that was used very extensively by Motown legend James Jamerson, though rest assured we're not going to be attempting any of his more gymnastic approaches to creating bass fills!

The simplest way to explain what we are about to do is to think of the pentatonic scale as a skeleton onto which we can hang a series of chromatic runs to connect up all the notes in the scale. The fact that each run starts and ends on a note in the pentatonic is enough for it to make sense and for us to not get lost in a blizzard of notes, but hopefully it will give us some more options when it comes to

creating riffs and lines, as well as fills and improvised grooves at jam sessions.

Let's start as always by refreshing our knowledge of the two pentatonic shapes. Example 1 is the Major pentatonic and Example 2 is our minor pentatonic. I've started them both on D here, so we can see how they differ from one another as shapes, although you're unlikely ever to see them next to each other on the same root like this:

EXERCISE ONE & TWO

Notice that the key signature at the start of Example 1 makes all the Fs into F#s and all the Cs into C#s. I've also made the TAB include no open strings, to help us move the shapes around.

Now, if we look at the D Major pentatonic, we can see that we have three pairs of notes on each of the strings we're using—D to E on the A string, F# to A on the D string and B to

D on the D string. Treating this as a skeleton means we can fill in all the chromatic notes in between those pairs. Example 3 does this to the pairs of notes on the D and G strings:

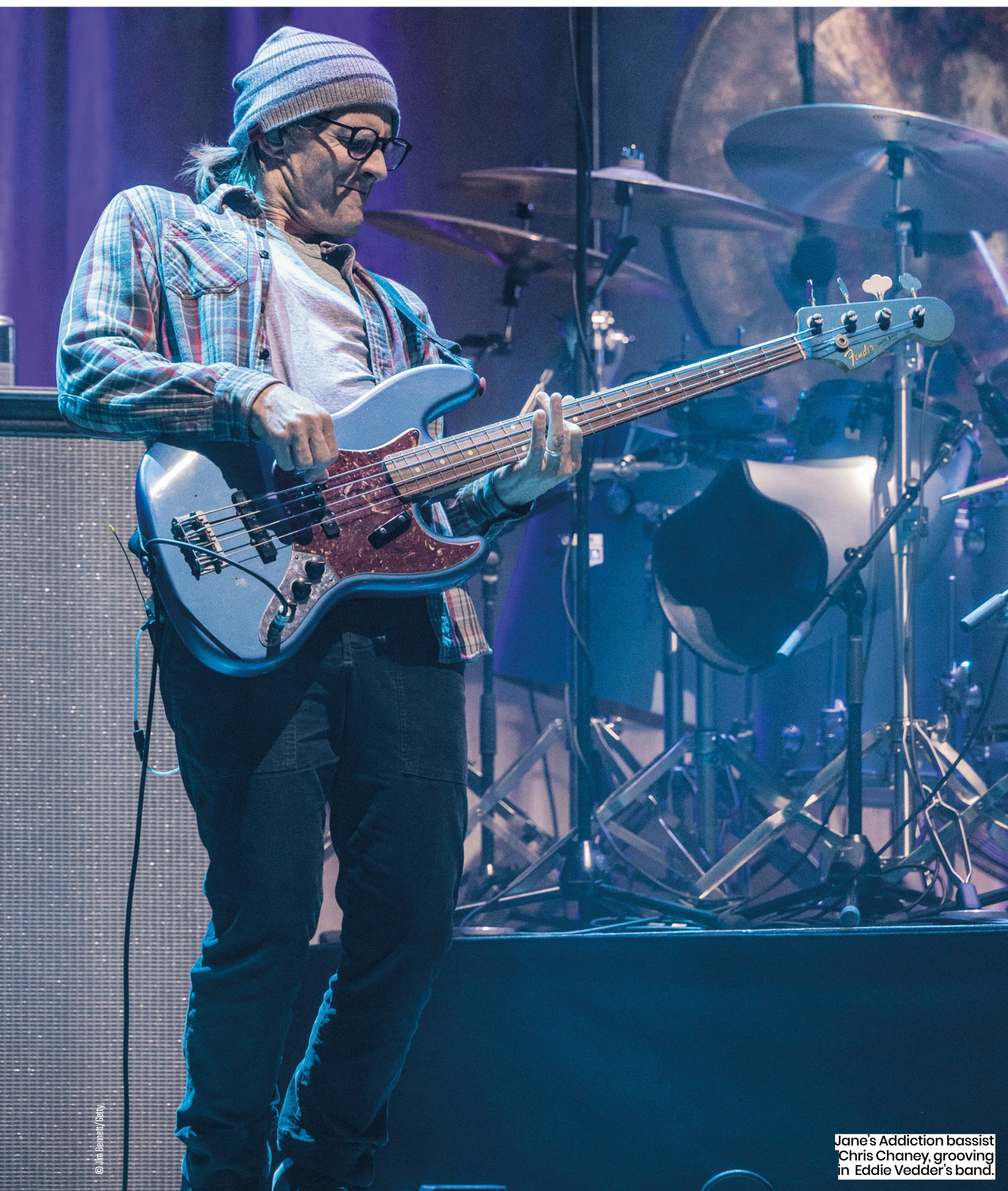
EXERCISE THREE

There are a couple of new issues for us here that it would be good to address straight off. The first is how to play four adjacent semitones with our fretting hand. A lot of time and energy has been put into arguing for and against 'one finger per fret' as a correct technique on bass. There are places on the neck where this can be comfortable for some players, but a lot depends on the size of your hands, the position in which you hold your bass and the speed and intensity of the line in question.

Whichever technique you use, learning to discern between fatigue from just practicing longer than usual, and specific pain from

EXERCISE ONE

EXERCISE TWO



© Jim Bennett/Getty

Jane's Addiction bassist
Chris Chaney, grooving
in Eddie Vedder's band.



Beginners Lesson

EXERCISE THREE

Exercise Three is a four-measure exercise in 4/4 time, key of D major (two sharps). The first staff shows the melody: D2 (half), E2 (quarter), F#2 (quarter), G2 (quarter), A2 (half), B2 (quarter), C#2 (quarter), D3 (half). The second staff shows the fretting: 5, 4, 5, 6, 7, 5, 4, 5, 6, 7.

EXERCISE FOUR

Exercise Four is a four-measure exercise in 4/4 time, key of D major. The first staff shows the melody: D2 (half), E2 (quarter), F#2 (quarter), G2 (quarter), A2 (half), B2 (quarter), C#2 (quarter), D3 (half). The second staff shows the fretting: 5, 7, 6, 5, 4, 5, 7, 6, 5, 4.

EXERCISE FIVE

Exercise Five is a four-measure exercise in 4/4 time, key of D major. The first staff shows the melody: D2 (half), E2 (quarter), F#2 (quarter), G2 (quarter), A2 (half), B2 (quarter), C#2 (quarter), D3 (half). The second staff shows the fretting: 5, 7, 9, 7, 9, 7.

overstretching part of your hand, is a really important observation to make, and it's always good to err on the side of caution. So, for our four-fret sequences, we can use fingers 1, 2, 3, and 4, or we can use 1, 2, 4, and 4, where we brace our pinky with our third finger to help stabilize it if using it in this way feels a little shaky.

You'll build some strength and a lot more accuracy over time, but as you start out, take it slow and don't be afraid to allow your hand to move smoothly from side to side instead of stretching to reach the highest and lowest notes. Your thumb should remain anchored on the back of the neck: That will allow you to pivot left to right and keep your hand in a relaxed position.

As you start out, take it slow and don't be afraid to allow your hand to move smoothly from side to side

As you move the pattern up or down the neck, try to locate the point at which you feel the need to switch approaches, assuming you're using one finger per fret further up the

neck. As an aside, if you're moving the pattern way up the neck, past the 12th fret, it can really help to swing the neck away from your body, as if you were pointing it towards the audience, to improve your access to those higher frets without your body getting in the way.

Let's play those same chromatic runs, but descending rather than ascending this time:

EXERCISE FOUR

With both of these, while I've written them to be movable to anywhere on the neck, it's

worth playing them using the open D string instead of the fretted D, especially if the jump from the G string to the A string is proving tricky. Judiciously used, open strings can make certain lines a whole lot easier, and even provide the foundation for entire new ways of constructing lines. If you can find a video of Pearl Jam's Jeff Ament playing 'Jeremy' or Metallica's Jason Newsted playing the intro to 'My Friend Of Misery', you'll see just how essential the open strings are to the construction of those lines. They'd be pretty tricky to move to a new key without retuning the bass!

With chromatic ideas like these, we can build whole riffs and lines around them or just use them to decorate an otherwise more conventional line. The choice is yours, so it makes sense to experiment. Find a guitarist who's willing to strum a D chord for you for a few minutes while you experiment with





Beginners Lesson

different kinds of chromatic line that land you back on the D. Once you've got comfortable with it around the D chord, you can move the same pattern and alternate between D Major and G Major, either moving it down to start on the 3rd fret on your E string, or up to the 10th fret on the A string.

Before we move on to look at the minor pentatonic, I want to show you a different position for the Major pentatonic that gives us a new set of chromatic possibilities. Here we will be playing exact the same notes as the in example one, but keep a close eye on the TAB in Exercise 5:

EXERCISE FIVE

This gives us access to a series of three-note adjacent sequences to replace the four-note ones we had in the previous shape. Have a look at Exercise 6 for an example of what's possible.

EXERCISE SIX

Moving shapes around the neck like this can help us find the right place for the kind of line we're trying to play. Not only can we use different kinds of chromatic line, but changing the pattern for a major pentatonic like this means you can slide or hammer-on to different notes in the sequence too. Feel free to move any line around and see what different positions make possible.

The patterns in Exercise 6 are more like being given a field to play in than a game with complicated rules

Right, let's finish up with a look at the minor pentatonic shapes and some ideas for bass-line creation with these concepts.

Example 7 is a longer line that uses both ascending and descending chromatic lines within the shape in Example 2. Take it slow, and take note of how the line joins up the sound and shape of the minor pentatonic.

EXERCISE SEVEN

There's a lot going on here, so as always if your reading isn't great yet, it's wise to get someone to play it for you or to program it into software to hear what you're aiming for.

The chromatic patterns here are endlessly variable. We can do the same with the minor pentatonic as we just did with the major, and move the same notes to another position on the neck to open up new combinations of notes to link with chromatic lines. This is more akin to being given a field to play in, than being handed a new game with complicated rules.

The invitation here is to experiment with note and rhythm combinations in your pursuit of new and interesting lines and ideas: They will become part of your grab-bag of personal licks and riffs that you call on

when writing or jamming. They also form patterns that your ear gets familiar with, which you then recognize in other people's music: You'll

be able to find them on the neck and play them that much quicker.

Perhaps the most complex aspect of Example 7 is the tied notes. Whenever you see notes tied together like that, the lengths of the two notes are added together. Here, two eighth notes tied together make up one quarter note. The reason for not just writing a quarter note is so that we can still clearly see in the notation where beats 1, 2, 3, and 4 are in the bar. We can see that the fourth note of the first bar of Example 7 lands an eighth note before the third beat, so we get what's called a 'push' on that beat, because the rhythm is accented ahead of that third beat.

This is a fundamental part of groove: Getting comfortable with rhythms that don't always land on the beat is an essential part of your learning. I write the lines in this column with regular, easily-readable rhythms, so you can always move them around, introduce pushes and rhythmic accents to 'vanilla'-sounding lines, write them out and get used to recognizing common rhythmic patterns.

Once you've practiced the major and minor pentatonic patterns separately, you can start to form chord progressions to try and move the lines over. Try the following chord pairs to start with: C Major to A minor, E Major to A Major, G minor to F Major, and B minor to E minor. See how the chromatic lines within each shape allow us to approach the notes of the next chord in a smoother way.

Experiment, stay curious, have fun and I'll see you back here next month! ■

EXERCISE SIX

5 7 8 9 7 8 9 7 9 7 9 8 7

EXERCISE SEVEN

5 8 5 7 5 6 7 (7) 5 6 7 8 7 6 5 5 6 7

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STEP UP!

REMEMBER YOUR RESOLUTION



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

Learning to improvise might seem daunting, but remember one simple rule: the name of the game is always resolution. Improvisation is based on nothing more than tension and release, and today we're going to demonstrate this using a rudimentary major scale. Say you play two notes separated by

a semitone: they'll fight one another and produce tension. You can then achieve resolution by simply moving in the direction of the prevailing pitch; this usually ends up being the chord tone.

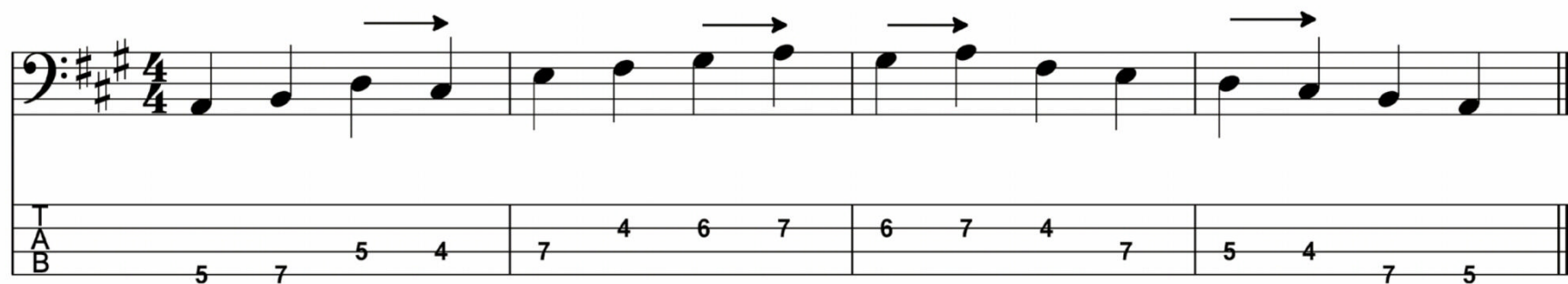
In the major scale, there are two instances of this. The first is between the 3rd and 4th degrees, and the second is between the 7th

and octave. The 7th is naturally a leading note, so when you play it, it will gravitate towards the octave.

On the other hand, although the 4th obviously comes after the 3rd in an ascending direction, you may find that it sounds more pleasing to the ear if you descend the scale. Let's work through this. ■

EXERCISE ONE

♩ = 95



Exercise 1 denotes the major scale, but instead of simply performing it in an ascending and descending format, we stick with the natural resolutions that surround the chord tones. This immediately enhances the overall portrayal.

EXERCISE TWO

♩ = 95



Let's run through some of the key aspects we've already established. In previous lessons, our focus has been mostly on the path that a simple I7-IV7-V7 takes to become a more sophisticated I7-VI7-IImin7-V7 jazz blues. In the last exercise, a VI7 chord was introduced in bar eight as a catalyst for the ensuing turnaround.

EXERCISE THREE

♩ = 95

Exercise 3 is a 12-measure piece in 4/4 time, featuring a sequence of chords: A⁷, D⁷, A⁷, D⁷, A⁷, F⁷, Bm⁷, and E⁷. The notation includes a bass staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The first staff shows the melody with accents and a 'sim.' (simultaneous) marking. The second staff shows the fretboard with fingerings (5, 4, 7, 6, 5, 3, 2, 6, 5, 4, 7, 4, 5, 4, 7, 4) and a 'sim.' marking. The third staff shows the fretboard with fingerings (5, 4, 7, 4, 5, 4, 7, 4, 5, 4, 0, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13) and a 'sim.' marking. The fourth staff shows the fretboard with fingerings (14, 0, 2, 5, 7, 5, 4, 7, 5, 5, 9, 9, 7, 7, 7, 7) and a 'sim.' marking. The fifth staff shows the fretboard with fingerings (14, 0, 2, 5, 7, 5, 4, 7, 5, 5, 9, 9, 7, 7, 7, 7) and a 'sim.' marking.

Exercise 3 is an interpretation of the last progression, with a slight refinement in the final measures. You'll notice an overhanging bracket: we often quote the motion of the former four bars of a progression in the last two. This modification enhances the turnaround, but also requires you to play the harmonic information in half the time. To make this easier, we're using nothing but root notes in those measures.



© John Patrician/The Portland Press Herald via Getty

The name of the game is always resolution. Improvisation is based on nothing more than tension and release

EXERCISE FOUR

♩ = 95

The image shows a musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The bottom staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with six strings labeled T, A, B, G, D, A from top to bottom. The fret numbers are written above the strings. The melody is written on the bass staff, and the guitar part is written on the fretboard diagram. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the tempo is marked as ♩ = 95.

7 8 12 10 13 9 10 14 12 15 16 17 15 12 14 9 10 13 10 12

A semitone approach-note method can instantly enhance more complicated chord progressions. This exercise examines the first of two structures you'll need in order to traverse through the I7-VI7-IImin7-V7 presented in the last example. Play the dominant 7th arpeggio over two complete octaves, enriching it with a semitone approach-note just prior to the root.

EXERCISE FIVE

♩ = 95

The image shows a musical score for a double bass piece titled "The Rose Tree". The score is written on a double bass staff (bass clef) and a tablature staff (T, A, B strings). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 95. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The piece is divided into four measures, each containing a melodic line on the bass staff and a corresponding fret sequence on the tablature staff.

Measure 1: Bass staff: G2 (quarter), F2 (quarter), E2 (quarter), D2 (quarter). Tablature: 8 (T), 11 (A), 12 (B), 10 (T), 13 (A).

Measure 2: Bass staff: D2 (quarter), C2 (quarter), B1 (quarter), A1 (quarter). Tablature: 10 (T), 13 (A), 14 (B), 12 (T), 15 (A).

Measure 3: Bass staff: A1 (quarter), G1 (quarter), F1 (quarter), E1 (quarter). Tablature: 17 (T), 15 (A), 12 (B), 13 (T), 14 (A).

Measure 4: Bass staff: D2 (quarter), C2 (quarter), B1 (quarter), A1 (quarter). Tablature: 10 (T), 13 (A), 10 (B), 11 (T), 12 (A).

Now, there's a semitone just before the major 3rd in a dominant 7th arpeggio. Avoid playing the approach-note with your pinky, as this will make the later notes more difficult.

EXERCISE SIX

♩ = 95

4/4

8 11 12 10 13 10 13 14 12 15 17 15 12 13 14 10 13 10 11 12

The position of the approach-notes in this exercise will feel very comfortable underhand. This is partly due to the placement of the semitone just before the perfect 5th, which allows you to use only your index finger for both notes.



Always resolved:
Sam Kiszka of Greta
Van Fleet.

© Ethan Miller/Getty

A semitone approach-note method can instantly enhance more complicated chord progressions

EXERCISE SEVEN

♩ = 95

8 12 10 12 13 10 14 12 14 15 17 14 15 12 14 10 12 13 10 12

Sometimes, vocabulary intended to utilize the semitone approach-note technique results in an extra diatonic pitch. This happens when an approach-note is placed before the $\flat 7$ th in a dominant arpeggio, referencing a major 6th interval. Thankfully, the 6th is a perfect affiliate to the harmony, so its presence in a dominant environment is ideal.

EXERCISE EIGHT

♩ = 95

7 8 11 10 13 9 10 13 12 15 16 17 15 12 13 9 10 13 10 11

Let's see how approach-notes can be utilized to envelope minor 7th arpeggios. As before, the first of these studies places the approach-note just prior to the root. In this instance, traverse both locations using only your index finger.



Intermediate Lesson

EXERCISE NINE

♩ = 95

Exercise Nine is a 4-measure exercise in 4/4 time, marked at 95 bpm. The notation is in bass clef. The first measure contains a half note G2, a quarter note F#2, and a half note E2. The second measure contains a half note D2, a quarter note C#2, and a half note B1. The third measure contains a half note A1, a quarter note G#1, and a half note F#1. The fourth measure contains a half note E1, a quarter note D#1, and a half note C#1. The fingering is indicated by numbers 8, 10, 11, 10, 13, 10, 12, 13, 12, 15, 17, 15, 12, 12, 13, 10, 13, 10, 10, 11.

Played with your ring finger and pinky, these approach-notes fall neatly under the fingertips. Visualization is the key. Remember at all times, 'If you can see it, you can play it!'

EXERCISE TEN

♩ = 95

Exercise Ten is a 4-measure exercise in 4/4 time, marked at 95 bpm. The notation is in bass clef. The first measure contains a half note G2, a quarter note F#2, and a half note E2. The second measure contains a half note D2, a quarter note C#2, and a half note B1. The third measure contains a half note A1, a quarter note G#1, and a half note F#1. The fourth measure contains a half note E1, a quarter note D#1, and a half note C#1. The fingering is indicated by numbers 8, 11, 9, 10, 13, 10, 13, 11, 12, 15, 17, 15, 11, 12, 13, 10, 13, 9, 10, 11.

Played with just two fingers, minor 7th arpeggios are easy to play in a linear fashion. As in Exercise 8, use your index finger to play both the approach-note and perfect 5th intervals.

EXERCISE ELEVEN

♩ = 95

Exercise Eleven is a 4-measure exercise in 4/4 time, marked at 95 bpm. The notation is in bass clef. The first measure contains a half note G2, a quarter note F#2, and a half note E2. The second measure contains a half note D2, a quarter note C#2, and a half note B1. The third measure contains a half note A1, a quarter note G#1, and a half note F#1. The fourth measure contains a half note E1, a quarter note D#1, and a half note C#1. The fingering is indicated by numbers 8, 11, 10, 12, 13, 10, 13, 12, 14, 15, 17, 14, 15, 12, 13, 10, 12, 13, 10, 11.

Although working through each approach-note permutation is a worthy exercise, it's worth stressing that some rudiments access scale tones which are not as complementary to the harmony as we think. In a minor example, placing an approach-note just prior to the ♭7th accesses the enharmonic equivalent of a 6th interval. In the case of minor chords, several structures all produce different types of 6th, so be mindful that this month's melodic device may not always be as reliable as expected.

EXERCISE TWELVE

♩ = 95

Chords: A⁷, D⁷, A⁷ sim., D⁷, A⁷, F^{#7}, Bm⁷, E⁷, I⁷ A⁷, VI⁷ F^{#7}, IImin⁷ Bm⁷, V⁷ E⁷

So how do we actually use this approach-note method? The answer will become a lot clearer once you've worked through this final exercise. You'll notice that Exercise 12 strongly resembles Exercise 3, where the final two measures benefited from root notes being performed as quarter notes (crotchets) to portray the harmony. As the coinciding chords pass quickly, it's an opportunity to craft a bass-line from our approach-note expertise. Once you've grasped this example, try to create motifs of your own, using the 3rd and 5th of each chord. We've already done the legwork, so good luck!

If you only practise one thing this month...

Although we could spend a lifetime studying scale types, acknowledging one straightforward discipline has the potential to dramatically improve your melodic voice: 'semitones create tension'. Try improvising over a G minor 7th chord with nothing more than a G minor triad (G-B_b-D). Then, add texture with the note a semitone below. The combination of both notes will lead to the discovery of a wonderfully employable melodic device.

THIS MONTH...

USE THE RAMP FOR CREATIVE IDEAS



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

The pentatonic scale has to be the most ubiquitous melodic device in all of music. It is prevalent in blues, jazz, funk, rock, and pretty much all Western music. It's also widely used in music indigenous to east Asia, south Asia and many African countries. I say all this to state that it's difficult to find anything new under the sun regarding pentatonic scales—so today, I want to talk about a great scale shape that can easily be used alongside the major and minor pentatonic

scales. I call this shape the 'Ramp', and it won't be long before it sparks a wellspring of new ideas to add to your vocabulary. So let's dive in!

This pentatonic shape starts on the second degree of the minor scale and is loosely based on the Phrygian mode. So if we were to use G minor as our harmony of choice, the root note of the Ramp is A. The notes are A, B $\flat$, D, E, and G. Exercise 1 gives you a basic ascending and descending pattern that ends with a descending G minor pentatonic pattern.

EXERCISE 1

You can hear how well the two shapes naturally complement each other. The reason for this becomes clear when we examine how the notes of the Ramp relate to the harmony. This pentatonic shape gives us the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, major 6th, and the root of the G minor scale. It is essentially the first inversion of a G minor triad (B $\flat$, D, and G) with the 2nd and major 6th added.

With the addition of the 2nd and the major 6th, we bring new color to the



The great Jack Casady of Hot Tuna

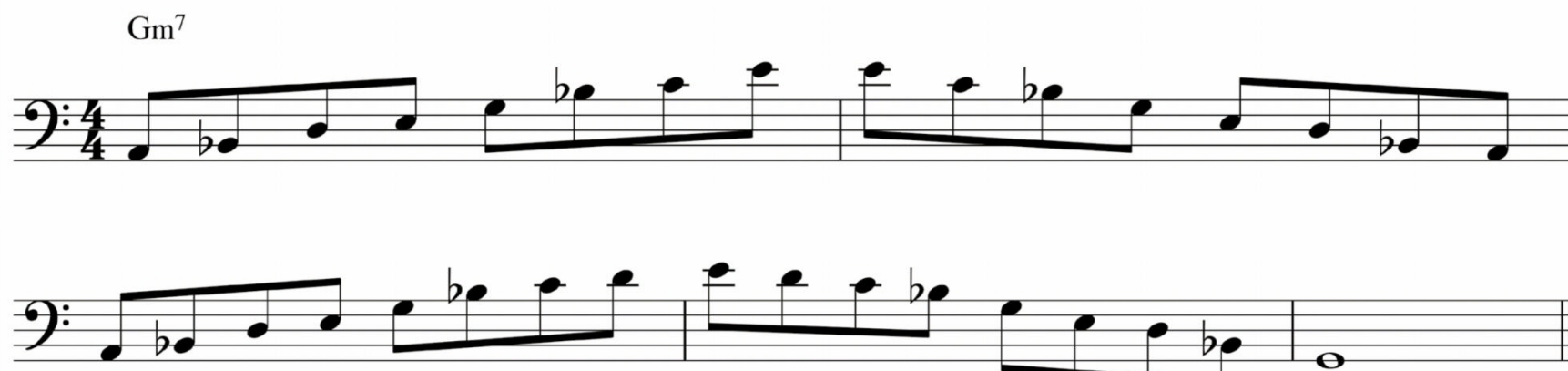
EXERCISE ONE



EXERCISE TWO



EXERCISE THREE



minor harmony. The major 6th on a minor can sound incredibly funky when playing fills or bass-lines. Check out this nasty two-bar bass-line in Exercise 2.

EXERCISE 2

Here, we have a perfect example of how this shape will sound with the minor pentatonic scale. We have the main theme of the bass-line based on a minor pentatonic pattern. The variation on that theme happens at the beginning of the second bar. As you can see and hear, the five 16th notes starting from the

very end of bar one make up nothing more than the ascending pentatonic shape from Exercise 1.

So far, we've only dealt with the five notes of this new pentatonic shape, which sounds great, but we haven't gotten to the Ramp just yet. Here's where things get interesting. In extending this shape beyond its root's octave, another interesting shape reveals itself on the fretboard. Have a look now at Exercise 3.

EXERCISE 3

In playing this example, you might recognize the shape of our Ramp coming into view before your eyes. Essentially, what's happening here is we have all the notes on the 5th fret. Then we have the 6th of the E string, 7th fret of the A, 8th fret of the D, and 9th fret of the G, creating a 'slope' on the fretboard.

Combining these two patterns creates the Ramp, and this shape just happens to be a great compliment to the pentatonic

scale. For the second half of Exercise 3, I added the note D at the 7th fret of the G string. This addition was mainly to close that

'The Ramp' is a pentatonic shape that starts on the second degree of the minor scale and is loosely based on the Phrygian mode

EXERCISE FOUR



EXERCISE FIVE



wide gap on the G string between C at the 5th fret and E at the 9th fret.

Exercise 4 uses every note in the Ramp to form a great little bass-line

EXERCISE 4

Here's another soulful four-bar bass-line to further illustrate that point. Exercise 4 uses every note in the Ramp to form this great little bass-line.

As with all the examples I've given in these lessons here in *Bass Player*, I suggest you play this line several times until

you've worked it into the muscle memory. Yes, you can play it as a bass-line, but it can also serve as a cool lick that gives you a sense of seeing and hearing the Ramp in different ways, using different note configurations beyond ascending and descending patterns.

Another great way to better understand a new shape is to play it right alongside something familiar. Take a look at Exercise 5.

EXERCISE 5

This exercise combines the G minor pentatonic scale with the Ramp to form a very cool little etude that sees you covering a wide range of the fretboard. But don't be fooled by the range and structure of this exercise. The main point here is to stay on the two shapes. Bar one of Exercise 5 is the ascending G minor pentatonic scale. For bars two and three, you'll be using the Ramp and only the Ramp. So you won't be playing anything below the 5th fret after bar one. The Ramp is the way!

I don't want to leave you without addressing the Ramp as it applies to the major pentatonic as well. In the case of the major, you have options. At the start of the lesson, I said the Ramp's shape is loosely based on the Phrygian scale, so we could follow the logic and play E Phrygian on the C major harmony. That's cool, but I think the Ramp sounds even better when you play it from a semitone below the tonic.

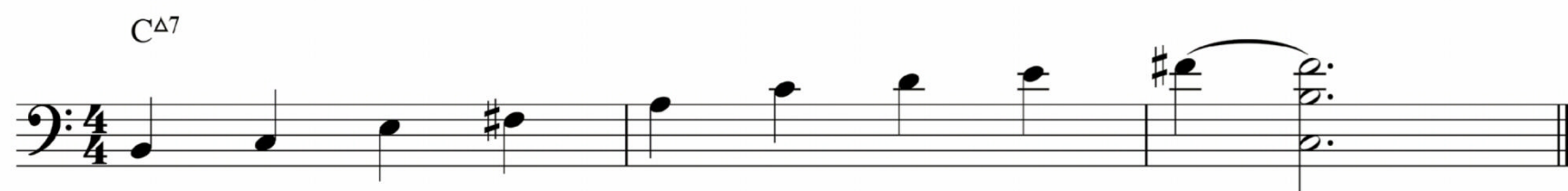
In C major, you would start the Ramp on B, which gives you the following: Maj7, tonic, maj3rd, #4 (very hip), 6th, root (octave), 9th, 10th, and #11 (again, very hip). Exercise 6 illustrates this perfectly.



Paul Randolph
recording in
Plymouth, Michigan



EXERCISE SIX



EXERCISE SEVEN



EXERCISE 6

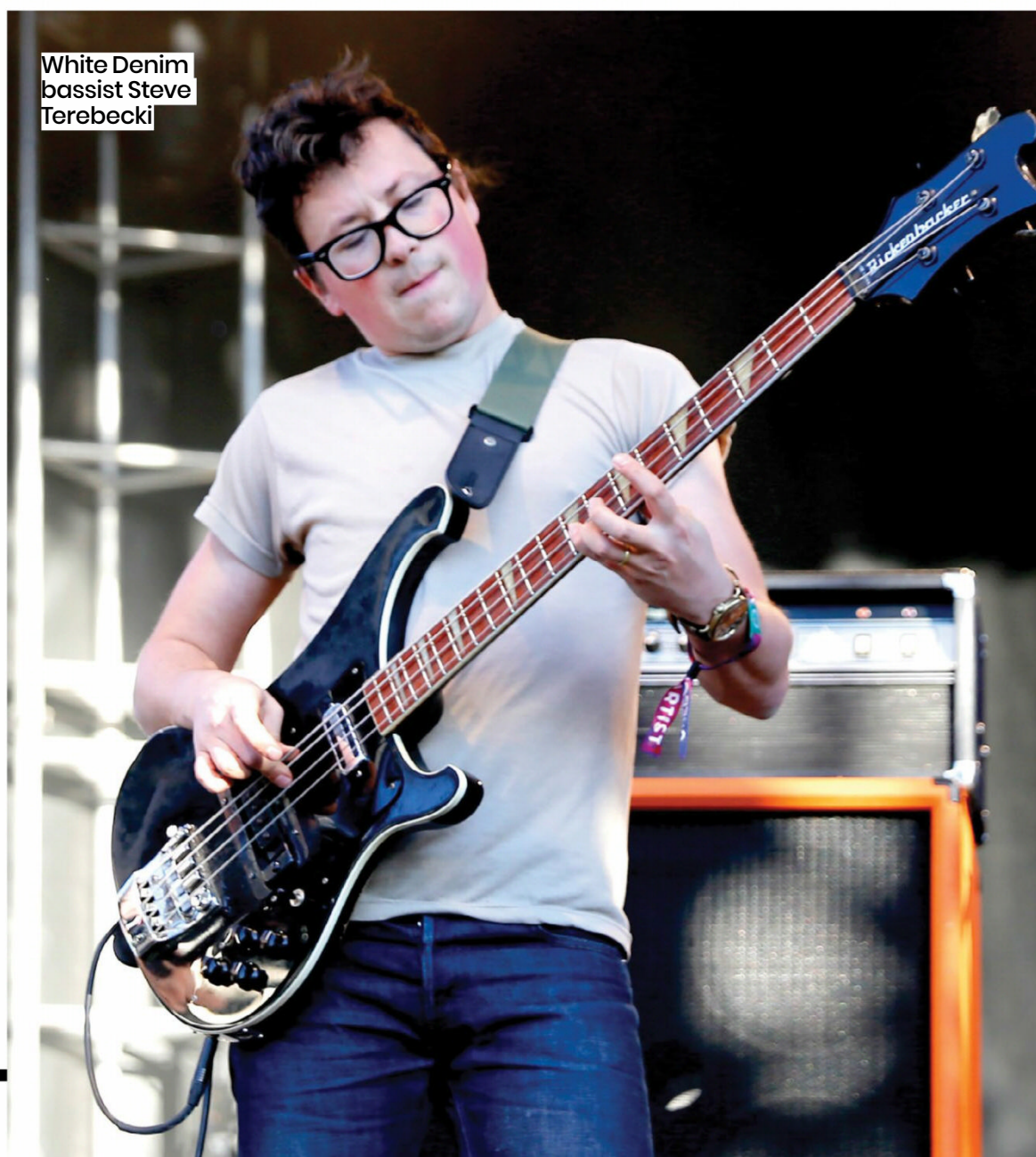
Listen to how beautiful the Ramp sounds over C Major when you start from the note B. Playing this shape from this position makes F# the MVP on the team, giving you the revered ‘sharp 11’ sound that immediately adds a high degree of hipness to the major harmony. Here’s one last exercise before I let you go.

EXERCISE 7

Exercise 7 is a combination of two sequential patterns using the Ramp. The first two and a half bars have you playing an ascending four-note sequence on our B Ramp. The last bit of the exercise has you playing descending pairs coming back down the Ramp to the exercise’s conclusion, creating a beautiful melodic pattern that might take some time to get—but when you do, you’ll be flying through these with ease.

I’ll leave you now with that bit of work to do. Take your time with these. If this shape is new to you, chances are it won’t sound awesome right off the bat. That’s okay. Take your time, and you’ll begin to hear these patterns and understand how and where to access the notes you hear in these exercises. You got this. Make music. Have fun! ■

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bassplayer

Welcome to BP's last page! You'll now notice a slight change as we move forward with this column: From now on I'll be focusing on a single item of bass-related gear, whether that's an amp, an effect or a bass instrument, rather than discussing a broader area of bass activity. Don't worry, though, the insights will be just as deep—and the sarcastic questions from our editor just as impolite! To kick off, let's take a look at the famed Steinberger L2, one of the most recognisable bass guitars ever conceived.

What a great idea—start the new page with the least cool bass design ever.

Shut your piehole! Once you've got over your prejudice against anything that looks like it came from the Eighties, there's much to love about the humble Steinberger headless bass, of which there are several models out in the wilds.

Yeah, like what?

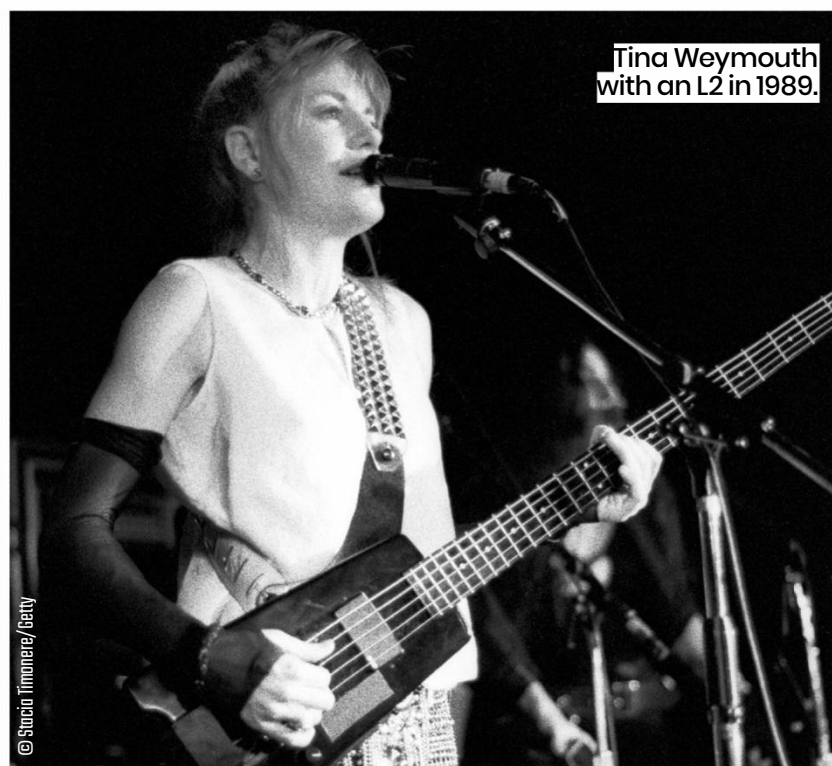
It's a complete triumph of innovation and form allied to function. Its designer Ned Steinberger began his journey into bass guitar design while sharing an industrial space alongside Stuart Spector of Spector basses fame, though Ned originally trained in furniture design, not musical instruments. Through their relationship, Ned began designing for Spector, which led to the bass we're dissecting today. Ned is noted as saying that he couldn't understand why musicians put up with instruments that were awkward to play—and his key decision, when trying to deal with instrument balance, was to lose the headstock altogether. EMG Pickups from California provided electronics in the

STEINBERGER L2

Dan Veall's new column focuses on a desirable bass, amp or effect. Let's kick it off with the original headless bass



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



shape of the EMG-SS, essentially a P-style pickup in a guitar humbucker housing. A friendship with Bob Young, an expert boat builder, led Ned to build the body from carbon fiber, and the L2 bass arrived in 1979.

Did anybody like it?

Hell yes they did. Launched at summer NAMM '79, the L2 was sold to John Entwistle, Tony Levin and Andy West of The Dregs. By 1981, the L2 had walked away with several design awards, including one of *Time* magazine's Designs Of The Year. In later years, a whole

range of players including Sting, Geddy Lee, Bill Wyman, Daryl Stuermer, Tina Weymouth, and Tim Commerford played them.

Okay, so how does a headless bass actually work?

The strings are anchored at the nut end of the neck, while tuning comes from a Steinberger-designed bridge with linear gears to bring the string up to pitch without slipping. All the usual intonation and action adjustments are catered for, too. Given that the strings are anchored at the nut and don't pass under string trees or

around tuning key posts, tuning stability is also improved.

Are the tones any good?

Obviously they have a very particular tone, given the materials. To hear this, visit YouTube and check out Chucho Merchan playing a fretless Steinberger live with Eurythmics on their Revenge tour in 1987. On the bass solo in 'It's Alright (Baby's Coming Back)', the fretless Steinberger played through an octave effect is just luscious.

Yes, but that was 35 years ago.

Are they useful for modern bass players?

Absolutely. For bassists who fly often, the Steinberger bass is about as compact you'll get for a long-scale instrument, and stowing it above your head in a cabin compartment is going to cause less friction with your fellow travellers. Also, I actually prefer having the tuning keys at the bridge end of the bass. Naturally, the tuning keys are smaller and compact, so even less space is taken up.

Aren't these things expensive?

Sure they are, but in 2018, Steinberger released the Steinberger Spirit bass, a more affordable version of the L2 that uses wood rather than the more expensive carbon fiber. These basses have less mass at the end of the neck, and therefore less weight to bear down on your shoulder. The current XT-2 model is 38.5" long and weighs just 7.5 pounds—perfect for us bassists who have been gigging for 30 years with bad backs! ■



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