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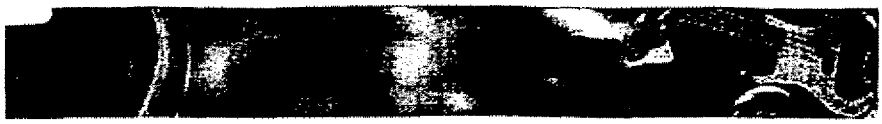
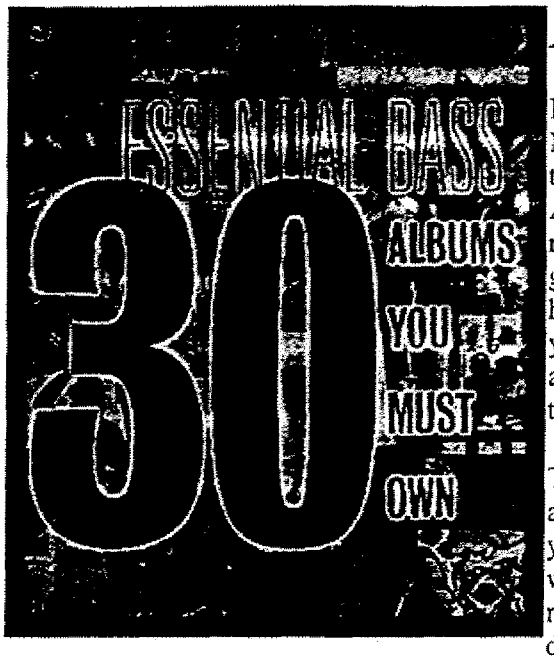


Artists

BASS PLAYER ONLINE



By The BP Staff

Listening to music is serious business. Nothing will do more for your playing than a steady diet of great bass music. After all, before you deal with the numerous technical concerns involved in getting your music out through your hands, you must first get the music in your head and your heart. To put it another way, having something to say is the biggest motivator for learning to talk.

The aim of this list is to give you more—and more interesting—things to say with your music. Every record here, some of which we've been listening to for eons, makes us want to put down what we're doing, pick up a bass, and *say something*. What more could you ask of your fellow bassists?

• • • •

Rules Of The Game

Before you begin skimming these pages and crying, "Where's Geddy?" and "No Sting? You stink!", an explanation of our methodology is in order. It was actually very straightforward. We simply asked everyone on our 41-member Advisory Board for a list of recordings he felt no bassist should be without. And, of course, we editors (as well as former Editor Jim Roberts) submitted our own picks.

Compiling the submissions was another matter. The lists were fascinating, but many were problematic. For example, both Michael Manring and Jim Roberts mentioned *The Bass* [ABC], a three-LP set that traces the development of jazz bass from Jimmy Blanton to Stanley Clarke. Sounds good, but this cool compilation has been out of print for some time, and

we felt availability was a must for a record to make the list. Then there was Contributing Editor Ed Friedland, who nominated *King of the New Orleans Keyboard* [Rounder] by James Booker. Sure, solo N.O. piano offers a goldmine of groovacious ideas, and Booker possesses "the left hand of God," according to Ed—but we decided to limit our selections to albums with actual bass players. Finally, several voters chose more than one album with the same bassist. No biggie, but variety was a priority, so adjustments were often necessary.

The question of box sets arose early, too. Though over half of the artists on our final list are featured in boxed collections, simply recommending "The Complete Recorded Works" of a couple dozen bassists wasn't what we were after. We wanted to keep the focus on key albums, not key careers. Besides, these multi-disc monstrosities are often disappointing rip-offs consisting of too many "important" outtakes and too little great music.

Still (here come the exceptions), we knew single discs would never do justice to the staggering resumés of two stars of our list. (Both were house bassists for vitally important pop labels of the '60s and '70s.) And we felt the same about an artist whose discography has gone in and out of print numerous times and has become hopelessly muddied by sub-par repackagings of classic material. It became clear that, in these select instances, only a comprehensive compilation would do. Luckily, these chosen few boxes are among the very best of such collections. Each is chock full of timeless songs and knockout grooves; there's nary a pointless outtake in the bunch. So rest assured, if you do spring for any of these big-ticket items, you won't be disappointed.

Though we all know such lists are by nature incomplete, we made a final attempt to cover still more ground by including five additional "personal faves" from each editor that, though lesser-known, nonetheless offer even more inspirational bass playing.

BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS

Babylon by Bus [Tuff Gong]
Bassist: Aston "Family Man" Barrett

Aston Barrett is the acknowledged father of reggae bass. His essential one-drop rhythms have infiltrated everything from rave to rock. (Did somebody call the Police?)

Recorded live during the Wailers' 1978 world tour, *Babylon by Bus* is driven by Family Man's immense tone and amazing feel. He and his drummer brother, Carlton, laid down some of the skankinest grooves ever; here they connect on several Marley classics, including "Exodus," "Stir It Up," "Is This Love?," and "Jamming." Though

the stadium-rockin' Wailers of '78 were a far cry from the bare-bones studio crew that all but invented reggae in the late '60s, the Barrett Bros. were never mightier than on *Babylon by Bus*.

This disc is also one of the best-recorded examples of live bass: it's deep, clear, and well placed in the mix (a real subwoofer delight!). Throughout the record, Family Man's '70s J-Bass surrounds the audience with a thick throb. Wicked bass, mon.

DUKE ELLINGTON

Solos, Duets and Trios [RCA/Bluebird]
Bassist: Jimmy Blanton

Modern jazz bass starts here. Duke Ellington's landmark 1940 duets with the 21-year-old Jimmy Blanton simply changed everything. The duo's continual swapping of rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic roles throughout "Body and Soul" and "Sophisticated Lady" is a clear illustration of Ellington's and Blanton's boundary-breaking approach to bass. But the centerpiece of this collection is the amazing "Mr. J.B. Blues." Based for the most part on the simplest of 12-bar forms, the piece allows Blanton the freedom to showcase (1) his masterful rhythmic acuity and pizz chops, (2) the unprecedented expressiveness of his left hand, and (3) his advanced grasp of extended harmonies.

Still, young Jimmy's greatest contribution to jazz bass is more a matter of feel than technique. His revolutionary ability to imply a steady beat without merely thumping on *one* and *three* provided the model—and the inspiration—for all jazz bassists who followed to continue expanding the heretofore-limited role of the instrument.

For some seriously in-depth analysis of "Mr. J.B. Blues," along with several other Blanton-era Ellington works, check out Ken Rattenbury's book *Duke Ellington, Jazz Composer* [Yale University Press].

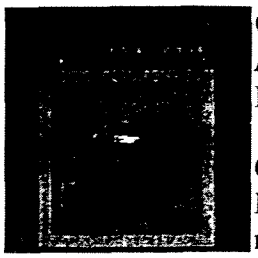
PATSY CLINE

12 Greatest Hits [MCA]
Bassists: Harold Bradley, Bob Moore

The fine and subtle art of country bass undoubtedly reached some kind of apex with these classic early-'60s recordings. Though producer Owen Bradley may have come up with the idea of doubling the upright with a flatpicked Danelectro six-string bass (ostensibly to render the bass line audible through tiny transistor radio speakers), much of the credit for the successful implementation of the new "tic-tac" sound goes to bassist Bob Moore and Owen's brother, session guitarist Harold.

Moore's stately lines and buoyant rhythms form, on their own, a near-complete study in tasteful country comping. But once Harold started doubling 'em with his Dano, the whole rhythm section achieved an airy lift and a delicate sense of motion few bands have matched since. From the rolling click of "Walkin' After Midnight" to the sweet

and relaxed bounce of "She's Got You" to Harold's elemental embellishments of Moore's line on "Crazy," this dynamic duo wrote the book that's still required reading for all Opryland wannabes.



OSCAR PETERSON TRIO

Night Train [Verve]
Bassist: Ray Brown

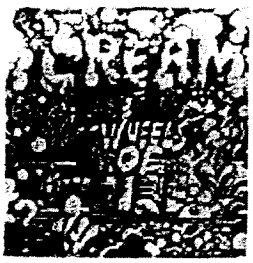
Choosing a single essential Ray Brown disc is flat out impossible. His name may grace more CDs in the jazz section of your local record mart than any other bassist, and his continuing career began — *whew!*—over 50 years ago. Just about everyone agrees, though, that Ray was always at his swingin' best when laying it down with the Oscar Peterson Trio.

The key attribute of 1962's *Night Train* is the heady, post-bop energy the Trio brings to an Ellington-heavy collection of pre-bop nuggets. Brown's modern yet thoroughly blues-drenched lines stir just the right blend of old and new into such Duke standards as "C Jam Blues," "Things Ain't What They Used to Be," and "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good."

For more of Ray's big, beautiful tone and jaw-dropping time, seek out Verve's two-CD Oscar Peterson collection, *The Will to Swing*.

CREAM

Wheels of Fire [Polydor]
Bassist: Jack Bruce



"Jack isn't just a famous bass player. He's an important source of music, a fountainhead where rock and blues meet with passion and brains. He's an original." Jeff Berlin wrote that (see Sept/Oct '93), and it's a perfect summary of Bruce's brilliant contribution to music history. Before him, there were only a handful of notable electric bassists, headed up by James Jamerson and Paul McCartney—and even they were known primarily for their skill as accompanists. Nobody had ever pushed the bass to the front of the stage and made audiences sit up and listen as Jack Bruce did in the late '60s.

Wheels of Fire is the essential Jack Bruce album simply because it captures both his studio and stage personalities so well. On the studio tracks, he's a thoughtful and even economical player, focusing on the groove, and he brings the full range of his abilities as a writer, arranger, singer, and multi-instrumentalist to bear. Live, Jack was (and is) a maniacal improviser, stretching the limits of the songs—and his gear—to the breaking point. The two live tracks on *Wheels of Fire* are classics, but don't forget the great stuff on *Live Cream* and *Goodbye* [both on Polydor]. And there's loads more to appreciate on Jack's solo albums, from *Songs for a Tailor* [Polydor, 1969] right up through *Monkjack* [CMP, 1995].

EXTRA! STAFFER'S PICKS

Dalis Car
The Waking Hour [Beggar's Banquet]
Bassist: Mick Karn
Karn's 1984 collaboration with Bauhaus vocalist Peter Murphy isn't for everyone-but if you crave otherworldly yet infectious fretless lines (including one recorded backwards), give this disc a spin.

Grateful Dead
Live/Dead [Warner Bros.]
Bassist: Phil Lesh
For decades, far too many people were scared off by tie-dyes to appreciate the brilliance of Lesh, one of bassdom's true originals.

XTC
Black Sea [Virgin]
Bassist: Colin Moulding
It's amazing how every bass line on this album is both unique and unexpected. The next time you feel like you're in a rut, check out some of these grooves.

Elvis Costello & the Attractions
This Year's Model [Rykodisc]
Bassist: Bruce Thomas
You haven't lived until you've rocked along with "Pump It Up" and "Radio, Radio."

Frank Zappa
Does Humor Belong in Music? [Rykodisc]
Bassist: Scott Thunes
The "un-sit-in-able" bassist in top form. The intro to "What's New in Baltimore" alone makes this disc worth owning. Runner-up: *Make a Jazz Noise Here* [Rykodisc].

-Karl Coryat

CACHAO Y SU RITMO CALIENTE

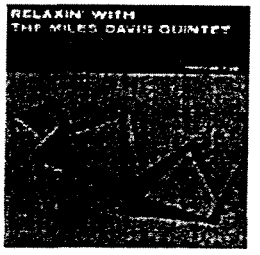
Cuban Jam Session, Vol. II [Panart] (Available from Descarga Latin Music, 800-377-2647)
Bassist: Israel "Cachao" López

A unanimous choice by our Latin bass panel (see Ask The Experts, page 26, June '97). During the 1930s, Cachao caused quite a commotion by bringing Afro-Cuban rhythmic elements to the traditional Cuban dance form called danzón. Two decades later, he revolutionized Cuban music again with this historic album, which introduced the descarga jam-session format. Lincoln Goines describes the disc as "A dictionary of Cuban styles over exquisitely performed short tunes and improvisations"; Oscar Stagñaro echoes, "It's the encyclopedia of phrasing, tumbaos, and melody, all in one." Andy González points to the interplay between Cachao, Pata Guinas on congas, and Yito Iglesias on bongos.

For some easier-to-locate Cachao, check out 1995's Master Sessions, Vol. 1 & 2 on Epic/ Crescent Moon.

MILES DAVIS

Relaxin' with the Miles Davis Quintet [Prestige]
Bassist: Paul Chambers



One look at a resumé that includes Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* [Columbia] and John Coltrane's *Giant Steps* [Atlantic] tells you all you need to know about the stature of Paul Chambers in the jazz world. (*Kind of Blue* boasts Chambers's bass feature "So What," while *Giant Steps* includes Trane's tribute to the bassist, "Mr. P.C.") Chambers was a mainstay on the New York scene from the mid '50s to the early '60s. Although alcohol and heroin abuse led to his untimely death at age 34, he nonetheless burned as brightly as any bassist in this century. On this classic 1956 Davis date with Coltrane, drummer Philly Joe Jones, and pianist Red Garland, Paul's modern, forward-thinking approach is evident via his strong, relentless, melodic walking lines on such tracks as "If I Were a Bell" and "I Could Write a Book," as well as his brief, bluesy, bebop-rooted solo on the Rhythm-changes romp "Oleo." (He was quite an accomplished soloist with the bow, too.)

STANLEY CLARKE

Stanley Clarke [Epic]

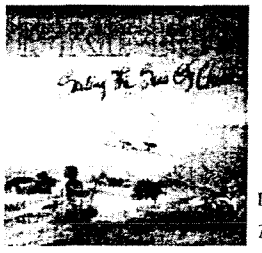
Bassist: Stanley Clarke

For many slappers, Stan is *still* the man. His squeaky-clean Alembic tone, aggressive snaps, staccato runs, string bends, and nasty harmonics are as fresh today as they were on the day this 1974 classic was recorded. This disc, Stanley's second as a leader, contains six songs of sheer bass terror.

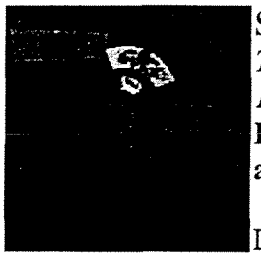
Clarke's band included late monster drummer Tony Williams, keyboardist Jan Hammer, and guitarist Bill Connors. On this record, they highlight Stan's electric prowess on such tunes as "Vulcan Princess," "Yesterday Princess," "Lopsy Lu," and "Power"; "Spanish Phases for Strings & Bass," meanwhile, demonstrates Clarke's serious upright skills. Sure, *Stanley Clarke* is filled with chops, but it also contains tons of *music*. (Are you modern slapmeisters listening?) Also recommended: *Stanley Clarke Live 1976-1977* [Epic].

PRIMUS

Sailing the Seas of Cheese
[Interscope]
Bassist: Les Claypool



Love him or hate him, you have to admit Les Claypool forever changed the face of bass. While he may not exactly have Gary Willis's technical precision or Jaco's fretless intonation, Claypool is one of the greats because of his ability to throw slapping, sliding, tapping, and chording into a big, sloppy, hugely quirky melting pot. Every Primus record has tons of woodshed-ready bass lines, but we chose 1991's *Sailing the Seas* because of such classic, super-high-energy ditties as "Jerry Was a Race Car Driver," "Is It Luck?" and "Tommy the Cat." In all of these tunes, Les takes a twisted, screwed-up bass line, wraps it with warped lyrics and other general weirdness, and manages to end up with a song that's both memorable and mosh-inducing. Many have tried, but nobody pulls it off quite like Claypool. For an even stranger effort, check out *Riddles Are Abound Tonight* [Prawn Song/Interscope] by Claypool's side project, Sausage.



STAX/VOLT

The Complete Stax/Volt Singles, 1959-1968 [Atlantic]
Bassists: Donald "Duck" Dunn and others

During the 1960s, Duck Dunn

EXTRA! STAFFER'S PICKS

Duke Ellington/Ray Brown
This One's for Blanton **[Pablo]**

Bassist: Ray Brown
Partnered with the Duke himself, Brown pays heartfelt and deserved tribute to his greatest influence, reinterpreting several Ellington/Blanton classics along the way.

Toots Hibbert
Toots in Memphis [Mango]
Bassist: Robbie Shakespeare
Reggae meets Southern soul as one of Jamaica's great vocalists covers his '60s Stax favorites. Shakespeare's stuttering, 16th-note spin on Duck Dunn's timeless "Knock on Wood" groove is just *too* cool.

Hollywood Fats
Rock this House [Black Top]
Bassist: Larry Taylor
A small-combo jump blues classic. Taylor has backed everyone from Canned Heat to Tom Waits, but his unerring swing and inventive note choices make him a natural for small-group house rockin'.

***The Real Kansas City of the '20s, '30s & '40s* [Columbia]**
This crucial, 25-track compilation charts the evolution of jazz bass, from two-beat tuba to four-to-the-bar walking. Take heed, jazzers-this is where it all began.

***Movin' On Up, Vol. 2* [Right Stuff/Capitol]**
A heart-pounding collection of African-American protest songs inspired by the Civil Rights movement of the '60s and '70s.

anchored a string of soul-pop hits surpassed only by that of James Jamerson at Motown. As bassist with Booker T. & the MG's, the house band for Memphis's Stax/Volt Records, Dunn plied his trade beneath timeless tunes by Otis Redding, Sam & Dave, Albert King, and about a zillion others—and this nine-disc set covers it all. Other bassists appear throughout, but the majority of these grooves belong to Duck.

Where else can you hear Jamerson with Marvin Gaye, Jimmy Williams with McFadden & Whitehead, and Marvin Isley with his funky Bros.-all on one disc? *Vol. 1* is cool, too.

-Gregory Isola

Dunn's approach was earthier—and much simpler—than Jamerson's, but Duck's grooves were every bit as deep. With only a few pinpoint, off-beat eighths here (Eddie Floyd's "Knock on Wood") or some stone-simple unison grooving there (Booker T.'s seminal "Green Onions"), Dunn repeatedly tapped into the very essence of a song's inherent rhythms. This unwavering instinct—along with that definitive P-Bass tone—assures Duck a sacred place in groove history.

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

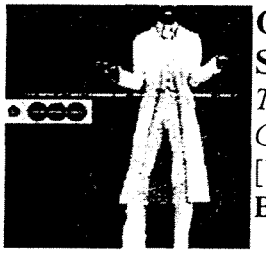
Blood Sugar Sex Magik [Warner Bros.]
Bassist: Flea

For nearly a decade, Flea was known as *the* thrash-funk bassist. Nobody could slap with his speed and power. But he threw everyone a curve with this 1991 disc: suddenly he was tasty yet supremely funky—and not in a flashy thrash-funk way, but more in the old-school style of Jamerson and Bootsy Collins. From the straight-up intensity of "The Power of Equality" and the Meters-influenced "If You Have to Ask" to the Bootsy-drenched, polysaturated phatness of "Sir Psycho Sexy," Flea offers an amazingly complete lexicon of funk, hip-hop, and even reggae. And he does so almost without a single slap. Say what you want about Flea's wild stage presence or even his technique—the man has serious *feel*, and that's one reason why it all came together for the Chili Peppers on this highly satisfying record.

EXTRA! STAFFER'S PICKS

Jeff Berlin with Bill Bruford
Gradually Going Tornado [Polydor]
Bassist: Jeff Berlin
A bass guitar giant and original voice who suffered by being in the shadow of Stanley and Jaco. Beautifully executed, melodic support playing, soloing, and-surprise!-singing!

Miles Davis
ESP [Columbia]
Bassist: Ron Carter
One of the most revolutionary rhythm sections in jazz history. Carter, the late drummer Tony Williams, and keyboardist Herbie Hancock took it as far as it could go before the onset of free jazz-and in many



GRAHAM CENTRAL STATION

The Best of Larry Graham and Graham Central Station, Vol.1 [Warner Bros.]
Bassist: Larry Graham

Larry Graham is credited with inventing the thumbstyle technique on electric bass. His groundbreaking work with Sly & the Family Stone and Graham Central Station established him forever as the Master of Slap. Although any record with Larry manning the bass is cool, highlights of his technique and songwriting can now be found on this choice 11-song collection.

Some of the tunes on this disc are a little sappy, but bass

ways they took it further.

Paul Young
The Secret of Association [Columbia]
Bassist: Pino Palladino
Virtuoso support in a pop setting (a bassist's greatest challenge) by one of the most original fretless voices in the post-Jaco era.

John Patitucci [GRP]
Bassist: John Patitucci
A classic album by the greatest doubler of all. Excellent writing and playing result in one of the 6-string's brightest, singular voices.

Tribal Tech
Illicit [Bluemoon]
Bassist: Gary Willis
Willis establishes himself as a superior soloist, a quality composer, and a 16th-note-based groove monster. An essential bass voice of the future

-Chris Jisi

lovers will still dig "Hair" and "The Jam," two tunes that fully capture Larry's warm tone, big thumb, and deep groove. Also killin': "Now D-U-Wanta Dance," with its super-slimy Mu-Tron line. If you've never heard the true origins of slap-and-pop, check out this—or any—Larry Graham disc. Funk at its finest.

CHARLIE HADEN & PAT METHENY

Beyond the Missouri Sky (short stories) [Verve]
Bassist: Charlie Haden

Charlie Haden has contributed his profound musicality and deep, elemental sound to so many fine records, how do you choose just one? There are the great early recordings with the Ornette Coleman Quartet, now united in a six-CD box set called *Beauty Is a Rare Thing* [Rhino]. There are his ground-breaking albums with the Liberation Music Orchestra. There are the five beautiful records he has made with his group Quartet West, as well as dozens of sessions with everyone from Keith Jarrett to James Cotton to Rickie Lee Jones.

Haden's playing is at its very best, and most essential, in small groups—especially duos. Charlie has made several exceptional records with a single collaborator, including *Dialogues* [Antilles], with the Portuguese guitarist Carlos Paredes, and *Steal Away* [Verve], which paired him with pianist Hank Jones on a program of spirituals, hymns, and folk songs. This recent disc with Metheny is perhaps Haden's best ever, because it's deeply rooted in his musical heritage and distinguished by inventive and inspired playing throughout. "With every line he plays, with every musical gesture he offers," Metheny has said, "Charlie supports, illuminates, and reveals something about himself and the other musicians he's playing with." There's no better place to hear that than on this album.

CHAKA KHAN

What Cha' Gonna Do for Me [Warner Bros.]
Bassist: Anthony Jackson

Like his mentor, James Jamerson, Anthony Jackson is not a household name. But among bassists, Anthony's musical, technical, and sonic innovations have made his name as definitive as "Jaco" or "Flea." The inventor of the 6-string contrabass guitar is renowned for his many contributions to seminal pop and jazz recordings.

By the time Anthony teamed with drummer Steve Ferrone to record with Chaka Khan, he had already gained notoriety for his legendary pick-'n'-phase-shifter performance on the O'Jays' "For the Love of Money" [*Love Train*, Philadelphia Int'l]. However, *What Cha' Gonna Do for Me* captures Anthony just as his various stylistic concepts came

together. Given much time and creative freedom by producer Arif Mardin, Jackson mixed spontaneous 16th-note bursts, pick-and-flange forays, and dense, booming low notes, and wove all of them tightly and unobtrusively into the groove. Other essential examples of Anthony and his contrabass guitar include Chaka Khan's *The Woman I Am* [Warner Bros.], Steve Kahn & Eyewitness's *Public Access* [GRP], and Michel Camilo's *Rendezvous* [Columbia].

MOTOWN

Hitsville USA: The Motown Singles Collection, 1959-1971 [Motown]
Bassists: James Jamerson and others

If you play electric bass, you owe James Jamerson a tip of your hat. He helped to make the "Fender Bass" a mainstay in pop music, and he recorded a few classic lines along the way, too. A ton of them can be heard on this four-CD, 104-track box set, which features 36 different Motown artists. (Other bassists heard on various songs include Bob Babbitt, Ron Brown, Wilton Felder, Clarence Isabell, Carol Kaye, Tony Newton, Bill Pitman, and Eddie Watkins.) James's index finger was dubbed "the Hook" because of his unorthodox technique of plucking only with the first finger of his right hand. It's hard to believe the funky lines he contributed to songs by the Four Tops, the Temptations, Smokey Robinson & the Miracles, Stevie Wonder, and Marvin Gaye were plucked with only one finger! This is the box set to own if you're interested in learning bass from pop's undisputed master.

Jamerson students also won't want to miss the book/CD *Standing in the Shadows of Motown: The Life and Music of Legendary Bassist James Jamerson* by Dr. Licks [published by Hal Leonard]. It's both an award-winning biography and a tribute to the style of Mr. Hitsville, with recorded examples and comments by dozens of big names from the world of bass.

EXTRA! STAFFER'S PICKS

Jefferson Airplane
Bless Its Pointed Little Head [RCA]
Bassist: Jack Casady
This would be just another laughable live recording from the '60s without the awesome power of Casady's bass.

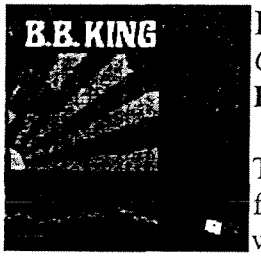
Albert Collins
Frozen Alive [Alligator]
Bassist: Johnny B. Gayden
Gayden understands both traditional blues and contemporary funk-inflected styles-and, man, does he *groove*.

The Allman Brothers Band
At Fillmore East [Polydor]
Bassist: Berry Oakley
The most melodic rock bassist of them all, at the top of his game.

Lucky Thompson
Tricotism [Impulse]
Bassist: Oscar Pettiford
Relaxed, swinging small-group jazz propelled by the great O.P.

Steve Swallow
Carla [Xtra Watt/ECM]
Bassist: Steve Swallow
Nobody sounds like Steve!

-Jim Roberts



B.B. KING

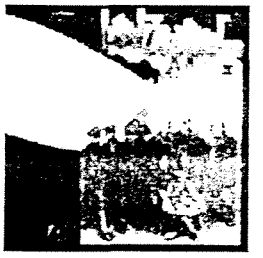
Completely Well [MCA]
Bassist: Jerry Jemmott

There's a problem with analyzing Jerry Jemmott's transcendent, funk-blues grooves with B.B. King: it's tough to maintain focus while you're shaking your butt. It's important to realize, though, that Jemmott plays the same notes we all do. For a prime example, dig Jerry's two distinctly different takes on one of blues bass's most venerable patterns: the root-

octave- b7th-5th pattern. In "Confessin' the Blues," he plays it relatively straight, but some subtly ghosted 16th-notes hint at untapped groove potential. Then, in "Cryin' Won't Help You Now," he fleshes out this tired box pattern with pentatonic passing notes and, especially, a dead-funky mix of eighths and 16ths that cooks underneath Herb Lovelle's bare-bones snare.

Also highly recommended: *King Curtis Live at the Fillmore* and *Aretha Franklin Live at the Fillmore* [both on Atlantic]. Recorded back-to- back on the same night, these two discs capture more of Jemmott at his sweaty best.

LED ZEPPELIN



Led Zeppelin II [Atlantic]
Bassist: John Paul Jones

It's hard to believe this record is nearing its 30th birthday. John Paul Jones's bass work on Zep's second record is simply brilliant. His round-sounding lines combine R&B, jazz, and rock into a complex style few bassists have been able to cop. Although the melodic, wandering bass line of "Ramble On" may be one of John Paul's most memorable parts, his big and bold line on "The Lemon Song" simply defines blues rock. (Look for a transcription, reprinted from an early BASS PLAYER "Special Edition," in a future issue.) And "Heartbreaker" showcases his most extensive use of effects; here, Jones combines distorted grit with Leslie-speaker wobble for one of the best crunch bass sounds ever. *Led Zeppelin II* is one of the original blueprints for creative bass in a rock setting.

PAUL SIMON

Graceland [Warner Bros.]
Bassists: Bakithi Kumalo, Lloyd Lelose, Alonzo Johnson, Conrad Lozano

When this 1986 smash album first hit the radio, there probably wasn't a bassist on the planet whose head wasn't turned by the incredibly interesting, free-flowing fretless lines of Bakithi Kumalo. The virtually unknown South African lit up such hit tracks as "You Can Call Me Al" and "The Boy in the Bubble," making a positively great album out of what would have been simply an excellent one. Of special interest is "Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes"—whose sublime bass fills manage to be busily syncopated and understated at the same time. It's parts like this that made even non-musicians look at the radio and say, "What an amazing bass player!"

BILL EVANS TRIO

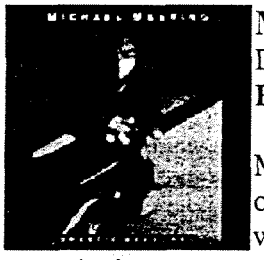
Sunday at the Village Vanguard [Riverside]
Bassist: Scott LaFaro

Just as Jimmy Blanton had done before him, Scott LaFaro forever

changed the direction of jazz bass playing. His early work with such artists as trumpeter Chet Baker and pianist/vibraphonist Victor Feldman hinted at his potential, but it was LaFaro's 1961 recordings with the Bill Evans Trio that showed his fellow bassists what could be done with their instrument.

LaFaro didn't just play fast (although he could certainly do that)—he brought a whole new dimension of improvisational thinking to the bass. His lines explored and expanded the harmony, and he often carried on a simultaneous "conversation" with both the piano and drums. When Scott soloed, he simply exploded up the fingerboard, playing rapid, rhythmically sophisticated phrases that are often called "guitar- like" or "horn-like" but are, most of all, *LaFaro-like*. And he always swung, playing with great feeling and passionate commitment. Every jazz bassist who has come along since LaFaro has had to deal with his playing style, either by imitating it or reacting against it.

This must-have CD has six tunes, with alternate takes of four; the program includes two LaFaro compositions, "Jade Visions" and "Gloria's Step." Seven more tunes, with alternate takes of three, can be found on *Waltz for Debby* [Riverside]. All of them were recorded live on June 25, 1961, only ten days before Scott—at age 25—died in an automobile accident.



MICHAEL MANRING

Drastic Measures [Windham Hill]
Bassist: Michael Manring

Most regular readers of Michael Manring's BP column fall into one of two categories: fans of his music who diligently experiment with the exercises, or those who read it just to see what amazing new playing concept Michael is introducing *this* time. Although Manring was already an accomplished veteran of the adventurous New Age Windham Hill label by the time he completed this 1991 disc, *Drastic Measures* (his third solo album) marks the culmination of years of pushing the envelope to see what sounds could be created with the bass. From the opening notes of the ensemble arrangement of the Police's "Spirits in the Material World" and into "Red Right Returning," the first of four amazing solo bass pieces, it's clear Manring is no garden-variety bassist. Instead, he's more of a composer who approaches the electric bass as an orchestra. *Drastic Measures* also shows that despite the difficulty of the techniques and tunings he employs, Michael's much less interested in flash than pure musicality. So on your second listen of the album, rather than wondering how Manring managed to master so many voices of the bass, note the pure artfulness of his compositions and arrangements, and let that inspire you to explore the musical boundaries of your own playing.

EXTRA! STAFFER'S PICKS

THE BEATLES

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band [EMI]
Bassist: Paul McCartney

Chic
Risqué [Atlantic]
Bassist: Bernard Edwards
Chic's slick disco productions rely heavily on Nard's catchy, super-tight fingerstyle funk lines and stylized fills. Also check out *Sister Sledge* [Rhino].

Brothers Johnson
Look Out for #1 [A&M]
Bassist: Louis Johnson
Thunder Thumbs slaps with *so* much finesse and style. When he sings "I'll Be Good to You," his bass playing proves it.

Japan
Tin Drum [Virgin]
Bassist: Mick Karn
Fretless prodigy Karn-captured here at the height of his pre-solo career-continually surprises by showing just how quirky you can be while still supporting the song.

Violent Femmes
Violent Femmes [Slash]
Bassist: Brian Ritchie
With no kick drum in sight, Ritchie rips it up on what's now become both an alterna-rock classic and a milestone for acoustic bass guitar, laying down solid, energetic support, as well as some righteous solos.

fIREHOSE
Ragin' Full On [SST]
Bassist: Mike Watt
Watt keeps it melodic and imaginative, always challenging the prevailing ideas of what a rock trio is supposed to sound like.

-Bill Leigh

Paul McCartney was the first rock bassist to develop a style that completely transcended the root-bound function of the instrument. While his style had become fairly well developed by *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver* [both on EMI], it wasn't until *Sgt. Pepper*—aided by the first direct recording of bass and a bottom-friendly mix—that it fully came to fruition. Where would rock bass be today without the bouncy melodicism of "With a Little Help From My Friends," "Lovely Rita," and "A Day in the Life"? Great feel, articulation, note choices, tone ... it's all here, and you'd be hard-pressed to find better bass lines to transcribe and memorize. A close second for Macca is *Abbey Road* [EMI], with its unforgettable parts on "Come Together" and "Something." (And check out that second verse of "She Came In Through the Bathroom Window"—the quirky syncopation raises the song to an entirely new plane.)

EDGAR MEYER, YO-YO MA & MARK O'CONNOR
Appalachia Waltz [Sony Classical]
Bassist:Edgar Meyer

In an era when a musician's ability to authentically play different styles is rare (and too often discouraged)—even within one idiom— bassist/ composer Edgar Meyer brings new meaning to the word "versatility." Called by John Patitucci "the greatest classical bass soloist on the planet," Meyer is equally at home playing bluegrass, country, blues, folk—and pop! More important, he enjoys working on projects that marry divergent styles, such as this hot-selling hybrid of Texas fiddle music, classical, and Celtic forms, which features contemporary violin virtuoso Mark O'Connor and classical cello genius Yo-Yo Ma. For more of Meyer's mongrel mastery, check out his 1990 solo disc, *Work in Progress* [MCA].

MARCUS MILLER
The Sun Don't Lie [PRA]
Bassist: Marcus Miller

Marcus Miller has had plenty of opportunities to grow musically. From sideman work with saxman David Sanborn to vocalist Luther Vandross to jazz legend Miles Davis—as well as producing his own vocal R&B albums—Miller had plenty of years to hone his soulful skills and develop his trademark tone. But 1993's *The Sun Don't Lie* marked the first time Marcus matured to a point of pushing himself to find and expose his own solo voice.

This broad collection of jazz-funk instrumentals certainly showcases Miller's hot thumb-thumping passages and quick fingerstyle licks. Yet, by sharing the spotlight with other great players—Miles, Sanborn, guitarist Vernon Reid, and others—Miller takes time to lay back in some badass grooves, showing that his sideman role of nailing it down is actually an integral part of his solo voice. And that is groovy indeed.

CHARLES MINGUS

Mingus Ah Um [Columbia]
Bassist: Charles Mingus

Like Miles Davis, Charles Mingus lacks a definitive album, simply because he reinvented, reshaped, and re-attacked his music throughout his career. Nonetheless, 1959's *Mingus Ah Um* might be his most *essential* album. He was at his hard-driving, inventive best as a bassist during this period (cue up "Boogie Stop Shuffle"—no one assaulted an upright like Mingus), and his powers of composition were bursting into full bloom. Indeed, "Better Git It in Your Soul" and the oft-covered "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" have come closer to achieving "standard" status than anything else Mingus ever wrote. Also, *Mingus Ah Um* is full of vital links to Charles's recent past, showing just how complete his maturation as a composer had become. "Better Git It in Your Soul" resurrects a rhythm riff from the earlier "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting," and "Open Letter to Duke" evolved directly from 1957's "Nouroбg" suite.

Just about any of his albums are worthy introductions to the genius that is Mingus. Other particularly fine starting points include *Mingus, Mingus, Mingus, Mingus, Mingus* and *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* [both on Impulse].

EXTRA! STAFFER'S PICKS

Eric Johnson
Tones [Reprise]
Bassist: Roscoe Beck
Tones may be a guitar record, but underneath the Strats are Roscoe Beck's imaginative 6-string bass lines. Dig the chord and solo work on "Zap."

Sade
Love Deluxe [Epic]
Bassist: Paul S. Denman
Denman's deep bass lines are the ultimate aphrodisiac.

James Brown
20 All-Time Greatest Hits [Polydor]
Bassists: Bootsy Collins, Bernard Odum, Hubert Perry, Charles Sherrell, and others
A whole lotta funk. Warning: This stuff may make you want to sell your bass.

Stevie Ray Vaughan
Couldn't Stand the Weather [Epic]
Bassist: Tommy Shannon
Stevie wails on this one, but Tommy's *on fire*. If the CD cover says, TOMMY SHANNON: BASS-buy it.

AC/DC
Back in Black [Atlantic]
Bassist: Cliff Williams
The hardest-hitting eighth-notes around.

-Scott Malandrone

WEATHER REPORT

Heavy Weather [Columbia]
Bassist: Jaco Pastorius

Trying to pick the essential Jaco Pastorius album can be as difficult as trying to choose one Beethoven symphony or one Sinatra song. Consider *Jaco* [Epic], his stunning solo debut, or *Word of Mouth* [Warner Bros.], his awesome Mingus/ Ellingtonian effort as a big-band composer/ arranger/leader. Others prefer Jaco's sideman roles, such as on Pat Metheny's *Bright Size Life* [ECM], Joni Mitchell's *Mingus* [Asylum], or his six albums as a member of Weather Report. Of those, *Heavy Weather* stands out as a highpoint.

Recorded in 1976-'77, the gold-selling record captures Jaco at the peak of his prowess, and a virtual textbook of his amazing skills are on dazzling display. The melodic ballad "A Remark You Made" highlights the gorgeous tone Jaco coaxed from his '62 fretless Jazz Bass. On the flipside, his high-energy bass anthem "Teentown" showcases unprecedented technical virtuosity. The album's "hit," "Birdland," boasts Jaco's revolutionary use of false and natural harmonics, and—alongside "Palladium"—demonstrates his innate ability to swing while laying down the nastiest of grooves. And don't forget "Havona": Jaco's extensive harmonic knowledge results in one of his finest compositions and arguably his best recorded solo. Check it out—you'll know why we forecast *Heavy Weather* as pure Pastorius.

THE METERS

Funkify Your Life [Rhino]
Bassist: George Porter Jr.

George Porter Jr. is a criminally undersung groover. The good news is this two-CD set from Rhino rescues the Meters' troubled discography from the murky depths of the cut-out bin and shines a bright light on one of groovedom's richest legacies.

The organic blending of Porter's spare finger funk and rubbery tone with super-drummer Zig Modeliste's slinky Crescent City rhythms is a defining characteristic of all Meters music. So is George's insistence on digging into simple, often pentatonic-based countermelodies, and then relaxing and grooving 'til the cows come home. What really kills, though, is Porter's injection of an anarchic elasticity into his space- filled lines, which allows them not just to breathe but to pant, moan, and groan. Righteous example: The *E7* intro figure to 1969's "Funky Miracle" can be played with nothing more than open strings and 2nd-fret pull-offs—but you chopmeisters would be hard-pressed to find a more fail-safe funk groove.

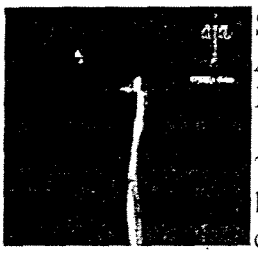
TOWER OF POWER

Tower Of Power [Warner Bros.]
Bassist: Francis "Rocco" Prestia III

True funk should make you feel a little tight in your shoulders and neck, with an irresistible desire to move your head, and a scrunched-up face that says, "Mmm ... somethin's *funky*!" If you've assumed the position—and it feels good—you're ready to sit and meditate on the construction of the groove. High on your listening list for deep-pocket studies should be this classic, which features Rocco Prestia's 16th- note funk barrage. Together with the busy-but-light drum work of David Garibaldi, Rocco reached new depths in pocket playing on this 1973 disc.

Since you might not want to dive right into Prestia's super-fast, repetitive-stress-inducing approach without a note from your doctor, try putting down your bass for this one and letting your ears do the grooving. Later, start mentally deconstructing the

groove. Imagine the track without horns or vocals; strip it down to the raw elements—the drums, those powerful bass notes, and the well-placed rhythm guitar dancing around the two. Focus on the rhythmic interplay between the instruments, concentrating on which notes Rocco emphasizes. Then focus solely on the space *between* the notes. If this type of directed groove listening doesn't have an impact on your playing—not to mention your outlook on life—maybe you'd better relax, assume the position, and start over.



STEELY DAN

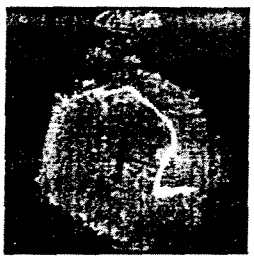
Aja [MCA]
Bassists: Chuck Rainey, Walter Becker

The ultimate in L.A. cool. If some of our other Essential picks leave you chops-dizzy, settle into the smoky grooves on this 1977 disc. Subtlety is the focus here: Chuck Rainey uses superbly slinky feels, tasty, well-placed fills, and a generous use of space in all the right places. Check out the fabulous ascending slides and double-stops that accent "Peg," and listen to those ostinatos and fills on "Josie"— they're relentlessly creative, from the first note to the last. But perhaps even more important than Rainey's notes are his rests. If you could somehow hear everything he *doesn't* play, you'd realize how silence can actually strengthen a bass line, like the mortar in a brick wall.

A runner-up for best Rainey/Dan collaboration is *The Royal Scam* [MCA], mostly for Chuck's blazing tribute to Jamerson on "Kid Charlemagne"—a line that could keep you in the woodshed for weeks.

YES

Fragile [Atlantic]
Bassist: Chris Squire



Perhaps *the* all-time classic progressive-rock album. Chris Squire revolutionized both the sound and function of the bass in rock music with his trebly, Clavinet-like Rickenbacker tone and his busy but carefully orchestrated and highly functional lines. He comes charging out of the gate with "Roundabout," propelling it forward with an energy that makes the song sound as if it's about to blow apart. Another radio perennial, "Long Distance Runaround," is slower—but Squire still drives the song with aggressive, fragmented riffs that trade off with the vocal. Then there's Squire's composition "The Fish," in which overdubbed bass lines provide melody, harmony, and rhythm parts—well before Jaco, Manring, and Wooten did the same. Every bass line on this 1972 disc is absolutely essential to the song's arrangement, a valuable lesson for us all. I mean, wouldn't you rather play parts that are crucial rather than merely ornamental?

VICTOR WOOTEN

A Show of Hands [Compass]

Bassist: Victor Wooten

Everybody knows Victor Wooten has monster chops. Sure, he can slap, tap, double-thumb, open hammer pluck, and wield a few other techniques that probably have even weirder names. Ironically, though, what makes his debut solo effort so worthy is not so much his "show of hands" but his musicality—that all of the tools and techniques available at his command are just that: tools. After all, what good are chops if you're not making music?

While *A Show of Hands* might not be the ideal listening assignment for exploring how to be a supportive player in your average rock, blues, or jazz setting, it's great for exploring composition, artistic sensibility, and new approaches to established ideas. Vic nails home the groove in his native funk land—but with his ability to manage rhythm and melody parts at the same time, he sails through everything from jazz standards to Bach-style counterpoint without a hitch. In fact, so much music comes out of Wooten's 4-string Fodera, it's easy to forget this is a solo bass effort.

A Show of Hands might be a good record to listen to when the needle on your own chopmeter is too far into the WANK zone and not far enough toward the MUSIC zone. It's also just a great record to listen to.

Essential Index

The bassists on this list have all been featured in BASS PLAYER before. Here's where:

Aston "Family Man" Barrett: Feature, November '96

Jimmy Blanton: The Tradition, September '92

Harold Bradley & Bob Moore: A Classic Revisited, September '92

Ray Brown: Feature, March '93

Jack Bruce: Bass Notes, Jan/Feb '95; Feature, Sept/Oct '93; A Classic Revisited, Jan/Feb '93; Private Lesson, Spring '90

Cachao: Feature, November '95; Feature, December '93

Paul Chambers: The Tradition, October '92

Stanley Clarke: Feature, Sept/Oct '93

Les Claypool: Feature, October '96; Feature, Jan/Feb '93; Bassist Of The Year, September '92

Jerry Jemmott: A Classic Revisited, November '96

John Paul Jones: Feature, November '94

Bakithi Kumalo: Feature, April '96

Scott LaFaro: A Classic Revisited, December '95; The Tradition, July/Aug '92

Michael Manring: Bassist Of The Year, December '94; Feature, Jan/Feb '94

Paul McCartney: Feature, July/Aug '95; Complete Transcription, "Lovely Rita," July/Aug '95

Edgar Meyer: Bass Notes, May/June '94; Feature, Fall '90

Marcus Miller: Bassist Of The Year, December '95; Feature, Sept/Oct '95; Feature, October '92

Charles Mingus: The Tradition, Jan/Feb '94 and March '94

Jaco Pastorius: Feature, Jan/Feb '91; Complete Transcription, "Amerika," Jan/Feb '91

Donald "Duck" Dunn: Feature, December '94

Flea: Bassist Of The Year, December '96; Feature, February '96; Feature, Jan/Feb '92

Larry Graham: Feature, September '96; Feature, September '92

Charlie Haden: Lead Review, April '97; Feature, August '96

Anthony Jackson: A Classic Revisited, Jan/Feb '92; Feature, Spring '90; Feature, Summer '90

James Jamerson: A Classic Revisited, April '93; Feature, Summer '90

George Porter Jr.: Feature, April '96; Bass Notes, Summer '90

Francis "Rocco" Prestia: Feature, May/June '91

Chuck Rainey: Feature, February '97; Complete Transcription, "Until You Come Back to Me," February '97; A Classic Revisited, July/Aug '93

Chris Squire: Feature, November '94

Victor Wooten: Complete Transcription, "Justice," March '97; Lead Review, April '96; Bassist Of The Year, November '93; Feature, September '92; Bass Notes, Jan/Feb '91

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